



Shiraz Durrani

PROGRESSIVE LIBRARIANSHIP

Perspectives From Kenya
and Britain, 1979-2010

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PROGRESSIVE LIBRARIANSHIP

Perspectives From Kenya
and Britain, 1979-2010

By Shiraz Durrani



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2014



Vita Books

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In class society...

In class society everyone lives as a member of a particular class, and every kind of thinking, without exception, is stamped with the brand of a class.

On Practice, **Mao Tse-Tung (1937)**

Librarians everywhere have a role to play in eliminating the root causes of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and inequality. It is no longer acceptable for libraries and librarians to refuse to acknowledge this social responsibility.

Shiraz Durrani and Elizabeth Smallwood (2008c)

Capitalist civilization has not only been a successful civilization. It has above all been a seductive one. It has seduced even its victims and its opponents. But if you believe, as I do, that all historical systems without exception have limited lives and must eventually give way to other successor systems, you must assume that our world-system cannot be stable for ever.

Wallerstein (2011)

In post-historical perspective libraries will increasingly come to be viewed as mere instrumentalities, facilitators of an "information economy". If, against this current, libraries are to continue to represent the dimension of human reason, emancipation, possibility that they have represented historically, if the human significance of the library is not to be entirely effaced, renewed effort to create a space for radical reflection on our purposes, our vocation, and our responsibility is required. This is the fundamental task of progressive librarianship.

Mark Rosenzweig (1990-91)

The apolitical writer is a myth created and given impulse by modern-day capitalism.

Pablo Neruda.¹

'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force ... The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.'

From Karl Marx (1845) 'The German Ideology'.

¹ Quoted by Pinder, Ian (2013): Pablo Neruda: A Passion for Life by Adam Feinstein – review. *The Guardian*. 29-11-13. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/nov/29/pablo-neruda-passion-life-adam-feinstein-review>. [Accessed: 18-12-13].

Preface

A struggle to liberate minds

My perspective on the theories and practice of librarianship required a radical approach that linked information and librarianship with their social, political and economic context. Relevant material to support my perspective was in short supply: there was little available evidence in literature, or in teaching or libraries around me.

I was not alone in feeling the need for material that encompassed theoretical and practical aspects of an alternative information system that could meet the needs of all people, particularly those marginalised by the prevailing systems. The students at London Metropolitan University, and those involved in projects such as the Quality Leaders Project in Britain, welcomed my views and evaluation of librarianship and information, as did the staff at many libraries in Kenya, particularly those associated with the various alternative projects initiated at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. They were ready for new ideas in a profession that seemed to many of us to be stagnating and ignoring the needs of working people. They, too, were seeking justice and equality in libraries, with little or no success.

Thus, there was a desperate need for new and alternative ideas, visions and experiences to respond to a rapidly changing world which itself was becoming increasingly divided between the few haves and the majority have-nots. The divide was no longer along a clear

North-South line. Each country has its own class divide. Capitalism that had created this unequal situation in Kenya before and after independence was now busy in the industrialised countries of the West at an ever increasing rate, creating similar social divides. But the library services in Kenya and Britain turned their faces away from their social realities and continued doing their business as in the past, not even bothering to ask what, if anything, they were adding to the lives of people.

While the library systems were happy with the status quo, many students, library workers and professionals were not. They were ready to challenge established practices. They were keen for a new approach in their chosen profession. An important challenge for all of us was to understand and accept that there were two trends in librarianship: the conservative and the progressive. The former had assigned to itself the sole right to the term librarianship, and having created a myth that there is no alternative (TINA) to *its* version of librarianship.

Satisfying these demands from students, librarians and activists for an alternative approach was no easy matter. One barrier was the prevailing TINA mind-set in the profession which had to be challenged. Another was a lack of appropriate material for a different approach. But it would not be correct to say there were no articles, books or experiences about the alternative approach we all sought. A useful starting place for such material was records of the progressive librarianship movement in the USA and in many European countries. The journal *Progressive Librarianship* does an excellent job of highlighting an alternative approach to conservative librarianship. Other initiatives, such as Information for Social Change in UK, BiS in Sweden and the Library Juice Press in USA, gave proof of many other people thinking and taking the alternative, progressive way.

In teaching librarianship at London Metropolitan University, I found that my experiences in Kenya, in Hackney and in Merton provided relevant alternative ideas, experiences and material to illustrate the approach I was advocating, and had also given rise to positive responses from many people from many parts of the world, indicating the validity of such an approach. It is this experience that I am making available through this book. I am particularly interested in the political work that provided a foundation for my alternative approach. While I intend to document the political aspects of my work in the future,

the library work emerging from this political – as well as library and teaching – work form the essence of this book.

The book is written in the belief that it is time to challenge conservative librarianship with its close links with capitalism in more actively in terms of ideas and practice; that it is time to challenge the power that it uses to control, censor, distort and hide information about alternative and progressive approaches. In order to maintain its power over people, corporate and finance capital seeks to imprison progressive ideas, experiences and alternatives. At the same time, it seeks to prevent people from knowing facts about its exploitative policies which impoverish people and drive many to suicide². It achieves this with the active or passive connivance of conservative librarianship and conservative media, among others. The struggle to liberate people's minds from this corporate prison and to bring to light hidden economic and political facts is perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing working people today.

Conservative librarianship, by its very nature, cannot take up this challenge, hiding as it does behind false concepts of neutralism. It is only progressive librarianship that is willing and able to undertake this socially important task. I hope this book contributes in a small way to this long and hard struggle.

Shiraz Durrani
Tottenham, London
February 4, 2014.

² See for example, Ismi (2012) who says:
 British colonial rule in India led to the killing of 200 million Indians and, with this holocaust, the country was forced into the Western capitalist system. Capitalism and imperialism created an abyss of poverty in India which continues today as more than 750 million Indians, about 75% percent of the country's population, are still mired in poverty ... The same pro-capitalist economic reforms that have made India attractive to Western capital and benefited the urban-based middle and upper classes have worsened the economic misery of rural Indians, especially farmers ... These neoliberal economic reforms were initiated in 1991 by the Congress Party government of Narasimha Rao, whose finance minister, Manmohan Singh, is the current Prime Minister. Under World Trade Organization rules, the reforms lowered tariff barriers, deregulated industry, privatized state enterprises, and promoted foreign investment. In agriculture, government subsidies were cut for irrigation, fertilizers, and electricity, and credit from state banks was tightened. The prices of agricultural inputs rose steeply, and this, combined with the flood of cheap crop imports into Indian markets, bankrupted many thousands of Indian farmers, driving a shocking 270,940 of them to commit suicide between 1995 and 2011. - Ismi, Asad (2012): Capitalism in crisis (Part III). *Monitor* (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives), November, 2012. Available at: www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/monitor/capitalism-crisis-part-iii [Accessed: 08-11-13].

Foreword

1: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o: Never be silent, never about the library

It was in my first year at a high school in Kenya that I first came across a library, as a building full of books. I hoped to read them all but I soon realized that a large number of them were written from the standpoint of the empire. It was a shock, mild though it was, to realize that a library was not necessarily a neutral entity. Its location, the books stored, the lending and the borrowing practices could be in favour of one or other side of a nation in struggle. Of course, Colonial and post-colonial Kenya were characterized by lack of buildings full of books: these remained in the major cities but not in the rural villages and towns. And yet information about the national struggle or what was happening in the world did circulate, somehow.

The school teacher who read a magazine or a book and then lent it to somebody else, or read it to a crowd of listeners, or passed the information through the word of mouth, which was then carried to others through the same oral communication system, was functioning as a communal librarian. Those who distributed leaflets giving correct information about the post-colonial dictatorship were, in reality, offering alternative channels of storing and disseminating information.

In this book on the progressive library movement, Shiraz Durrani challenges us to look at the concept and practice of library differently, while providing invaluable information on the alternatives in both

Kenya and Britain. He thus continues the critical tradition he has already established with his earlier works, particularly, *Never Be Silent*. It's all right to be silent inside a library but never about a library.

2: David Percival³

What follows is a story of library workers in struggle in Kenya and the United Kingdom. Struggles against leaders and other policy makers resistant to change. Struggles against racism. Struggles that have not been without danger, either professionally or personally (and on occasion, both).

Shiraz Durrani's timely book appears at a critical moment for public libraries in the United Kingdom. It provides an argument for sustainable, dynamic and progressive library services as opposed to those provided by a dominant paradigm of librarianship which might broadly be defined as passive and conservative.

Recently, there has been a tendency to cut back on the more progressive and inclusive library services that have been developed in favour of a pared down, traditional service. It is tempting to apportion blame on the current crises affecting public library services solely on the present Coalition government's austerity measures. Whilst they have indeed played a significant role, perhaps they have merely hastened the decline of a service whose intrinsic conservatism has failed to meet the needs of the people who need them most. Under the preceding Labour government, at the turn of the millennium, there was a slew of progressive pronouncements made and policies written, but there was little or no money to put these into action. The limited number of progressive library service developments that were made were, more often than not, funded by charitable organisations as there was no investment from elsewhere.

There appears to be a set of public library tenets, hard-wired in policy documents, advocacy and unproblematically espoused by librarians. They can broadly be defined to state that, over and above the classic function of providing books, information and knowledge, public libraries are:

³ Learning and Engagement Manager, Portsmouth City Council Portsmouth Central Library. Portsmouth, UK.

- a neutral space, open to all
- an empowering space where free access to information leads to an enlightened citizenry able to participate in a democratic society
- and therefore a place where people can begin the process of transforming their lives.

Taken at face value these could be interpreted as progressive, radical and, perhaps we can go as far as to say, even revolutionary principles. It is certainly difficult to imagine that, if public libraries had not existed for over 150 years, they would be developed from scratch in the current economic climate.

The paradox, as Shiraz goes on to document, is that despite the progressive rhetoric, those who tend to wield power in terms of allocating resources and developing library services are conservatives, often resistant to change and preferring to maintain the *status quo*. Neutral implies impartial, or not given to supporting one side or another but every item on library shelves, the services provided (and more importantly, not provided) are the result of political decisions. Yet many in the profession consider themselves at best apolitical or at worst above politics. CILIP, the body for library and information professionals in the UK, has generally been reluctant to become involved in the political struggles affecting the profession and its workers, claiming its role is not political. As Shiraz goes on to demonstrate, “both libraries and librarians are always part of a broader social and political reality” and again, “the professional is the political”.

There have been many attempts to defend the profession in the light of large scale budgetary cuts. It is said that librarians hold particular skills that are worth safeguarding. We need to look closely at what these skills are. At best they can help librarians investigate solutions to the problems in their communities. At worst, professionalism is simply used to maintain the *status quo*, where librarians are gatekeepers of, rather than facilitators to, knowledge. In an age of RFID technology, circulation desks may have been removed but other barriers between the librarian and the public remain.

We do need to rethink the values of librarianship as a profession, particularly if these values can become a barrier, where the service

provider dictates what is provided to the community. Professionalism can then become a tool of exclusion with professional arrogance denying the opportunity for people to document their own struggles and experiences. As long as there are barriers to members of a community, the library service can never consider itself open to all.

Of course we should continue to serve the people who currently use our services, but if we are truly a service open to all, then resources must equitably be provided to developing services to all. Progressive librarians need to ensure that this takes place, otherwise there is a tendency for library services to allocate materials' budgets essentially on providing more for existing library users.

The documentation of the post-colonial library service in Kenya has relevance today as we see how, in that country, library services were developed in terms that we would broadly define today as community engagement or co-production - terms that conservative librarianship in the UK speaks a lot about but, more often than not, fails to deliver. The necessity of co-produced library services is vital in the present economic climate. The conservative approach is to be preoccupied with the number of library buildings open or closed and the number of hours they are open. The progressive approach is to investigate the capacity people have for making use of the resources that are available. We could do well to learn from these African experiences, in which ALL library workers, not just the professionally qualified, were far more proactively engaged with their communities compared to the often passive model of library outreach that takes place in the UK today.

Ultimately, Shiraz asks us not to be neutral, but for progressive library workers to take a stand and challenge the myth of neutrality. He asks us what we want libraries to look like. Instead of clinging on to what we have got, we need a public library service that reflects, serves and makes a significant contribution to a society based on principles of equality, human rights and social justice for all. There is no alternative.

3: Catherine Lusted⁴

Over the last twenty years people have found new ways to access information. Yet those managing public libraries have complacently and compliantly continued to manage in the same old ways, allowing the steady decline of user statistics. Now we find ourselves at a crossroads of austerity measures where the only passable routes are cuts to staffing, services or library closures. It is too late to start a debate about what public libraries are and the benefits that experienced, trained librarians bring to the quality and development of services. Conservative librarianship has spread the idea that anyone with an empty building and a few books can run a library.

Public libraries are in decline, not because communities no longer need them, as we are so often told, but because the service has failed to respond to changes in society. The quiet privatisation of public library work has been slowly growing for years. Supplier selection, for example, takes away librarians' ability to provide for the local community by placing control of stock in the hands of a decreasing number of companies wishing to sell their choice of stock. Privatising library services wholesale will not fix the problems faced, but accelerate the decline in use by reducing value-added services even more. In the future, this will allow policy makers to cut services even further. It is a little stated fact that more people, in the UK at least, use libraries than visit football matches. In a climate of huge financial excess, no one suggests closing down football clubs, even where they have been mismanaged and financed way beyond their means. In fact, campaigns are launched to save them from extinction. Where libraries are closed, campaigners accuse councils of mismanagement, even where government cuts are forced on them.

As librarians, we have failed our communities by not educating them to be information literate and by failing to show them how to find the information *they* need rather than that which others wish them to read. Nor have we engaged locals in consultation to help design and deliver services, giving them both a voice and an understanding of bureaucratic systems. Being a progressive librarian is much harder than staying in the comfortable mainstream position neutral.

⁴ Senior Librarian, London.

It requires a constant need to keep abreast of social issues, political policies and local changes. It also requires a determination to uncover the true picture from the volume of mainstream messages.

There are many committed librarians working hard to make a difference to the lives of their communities. In the short term, while managers are busy finding ways to make cuts, these progressive librarians have a window in which to share ideas, engage with communities and talk to partners who may be able to continue their work in new ways.

This book is required reading for all those working in public libraries, whether qualified librarians or not. It sets out why public libraries are so important, how change is achievable and how all people can be supported to use information to improve their lives. Told through the remarkable career of an inspirational librarian, it gives hope to all those wishing to do more than issue a pile of mindless books.

Acknowledgment

The Introduction to this book states: "It is hoped that this book will encourage critical research on the ideas, concerns and experiences covered". This had a positive impact on Alice Corble, a PhD student who responded: "I would like to be one such researcher!" And indeed she has been. Alice is an informed and interested scholar with a clear grasp of the subject area. Her critical comments and searching questions have helped me to clarify and develop further some aspects covered in the book.

Alice's further contribution to this book, in the form of a well thought-out and reflective Afterword and her Questions for Reflection, are useful additions which enhance the value of the book as a teaching and learning tool.

*

The experiences recorded in this book could never have been undertaken had it not been for the active support of hundreds of librarians and political activists in Kenya and in Britain. Their enthusiastic involvement made it possible to challenge the *status quo* of a closed doors and closed minds attitude created by conservative librarianship, with the backing of the political establishment in both countries. They showed that the achievement of social, economic and political justice in the information sector is possible, that there is an

alternative to imperialist oppression, exploitation and inequality in both the societies. They showed that progressive librarianship is both possible and necessary to achieve justice and equality in libraries and in information. They put into practice the Pan African movement's slogan, "Organise, do not agonise".

*

The co-authors of my articles listed in the References to this book and to my earlier book, *Information for Liberation* (2008b), made it possible to undertake this long journey and to document its important stages. Their creativity, support and involvement in the library and political activities and projects made it possible for progressive librarianship to progress.

*

The cover design by John Chandler is based on a photo from the play *Kinjikitile, Maji Maji*, an initiative of the Library Cell in Nairobi in 1984. The photo illustrates the role that library service can play in providing needed information and knowledge through a relevant *form*, such as drama, to supplement the book-related service. At the same time, it highlights the requirement that the *content* of services should be relevant to people's information and learning needs. Thus form and content reinforce each other and expand people's horizons by increasing their awareness and knowledge - in this case through historical, social and political information. This was the approach of the progressive librarianship movement in Kenya.

*

Finally, a big *Asante* to the writers of the Foreword to the book.

Introduction

Concerns and concepts

Under capitalism, librarianship has developed into a one-track, blinkered profession which sees society and its needs from the perspectives of the dominant classes, leaving out the majority of working people with a tokenistic service with claims of being open to all. But it is not the only profession that has evolved as a tool to serve corporate and ruling class interests. Such blinkered perspective is common to all professions operating under a political system dominated by market forces. Several examples from other professions are mentioned later in this book.

But as with other aspects of life, the contradictions created by capitalism inevitably give rise to resistance to the dominant ideas and practices. There then emerges a struggle between the two trends: a conservative one and a progressive one, although the former is often the only one visible on the surface or even officially acknowledged. Resistance to the immense power of corporate and finance capital, supported by capitalist states and governments, is fiercely suppressed – in terms of ideas and visions but also through the use of physical force often disguised as war on terrorism, law and order or destroying non-existent weapons of mass destruction. It is the ideas, policies and practices in librarianship, information and knowledge that are the concern of this book.

While the conservative, capitalism-oriented ideas and practices

in the information world have been promoted and supported by those in power, the alternative, progressive perspectives have been systematically suppressed. This book seeks to redress this imbalance by examining aspects of the latter. In doing so, it also shows what the opposite - conservative librarianship - stands for. However, as the title of the book implies, this is not a comprehensive study of progressive librarianship worldwide. It focuses on progressive librarianship in public libraries in Kenya and Britain, although some issues raised may be relevant to other types of libraries, as well as to public libraries in other countries. Again, its scope is limited to experiences over a limited period of time, roughly between 1980 and 2010. Nor does the book profess to be a comprehensive study of every aspect of progressive librarianship in these two countries during this period. Broadly, it covers ideas and experiences in which the author was involved. As such, it is like a story in which the narrator participated. It is for this reason that Part Two of the book is entitled Personal Perspective, and which has influenced Part 1 as well as the overall perspective on progressive librarianship. Ideas and knowledge developed during the practice of progressive librarianship have then informed future action which in turn lead to the development of new ideas and knowledge in an on-going cycle. Learning from this process is an important and distinguishing feature of progressive librarianship.

The book does not compare the aims and achievements of progressive librarianship with those of conservative librarianship. The latter has had the field entirely to itself in terms of research, national policy, published material, teaching and learning and practice over a long period of time. Thus the aim is to help to tilt the balance in favour of progressive librarianship. It is then for the profession, the public, and the power holders to decide which approach best meets their needs. It is the power relations and state of class struggle at particular times in particular countries which will ultimately decide which approach - progressive or conservative - is the dominant one.

Even under conservative library practice, there is no lack of ideas and policies to develop library services which can meet some of the needs of the majority of people. IFLA/UNESCO (1994), for example, provides a programme that could lead to developing a service along the lines suggested by progressive librarianship, except perhaps in the crucial political aspect. Unless good intentions and policies are put

into practice in an appropriate way, they remain in the realm of dreams. This book provides evidence that service does improve and staff do develop when progressive and innovative ideas are put into practice.

An interesting feature of the experiences described here is the availability of written records, published or unpublished, about these progressive experiences. This is partly a reflection of the fact that progressive librarianship is evidence-based and it encourages a meticulous collection of evidence of its ideas and experiences in order to allow for the further development of research and practice in this field. It is also a reflection of the harsh conditions under which the activities detailed in this book took place. Every idea and every action had to be fully justified to the policy makers and the power structures governing the respective library and information services, which were generally controlled by those supporting conservative librarianship. A case, based on logic and evidence, has thus to be made to convince not only the management, but library staff and community members that progressive practices meet needs better than the status quo. For many of them, these were new, untested ideas. Appropriate records then had to be kept to monitor and report on the progress. As a result, researchers now have ample material to look deeper into these ideas and practices. It is hoped that this book will encourage critical research on the ideas, concerns and experiences covered here as that is a positive way of developing progressive librarianship further.

“Skeleton in the cupboard”

Any study of public libraries, whether in Kenya, Britain or the United States of America, needs to begin with what Black (2000) calls “skeleton in the cupboard”. Under the sub-title of “social class and public library in Britain through 150 years”, Black examines an underlying trend in public libraries that remains officially unrecognised and therefore not addressed: who controls the direction and vision of public libraries. The issues raised by Black (2000) are so fundamental to public librarianship that his paper needs to be a required first reading for all practicing librarians, students of librarianship and policy makers. The issues raised by him are particularly relevant for progressive librarianship in posing a challenge to conservative librarianship. It is important to look seriously at some facts revealed by Black (2000):

... there is one 'skeleton of control and conservatism' in the public library cupboard which has consistently been kept hidden: the issue of social class. Because of its inherently contentious nature, class is a question which supporters and providers of the ostensibly *neutral* public library have for the most part approached at a superficial level, hoping that assurances of continuing universal access would in some way make the question go away. Class is an enduring feature of British society...yet class is something which for 150 years, the public library in Britain has largely failed to come to terms with.

Black goes on to explain how class relations have affected libraries when he says "in fact, public libraries have always been promoted in varying degrees by the middle classes, for *themselves*". Black continues: "Thus public libraries ... in the language of Habermas, contributed to the construction of a bourgeois 'public sphere' designed to challenge the authority of the landed classes". Black provides a direct challenge to the profession:

Looking behind the public library's sound, democratic façade, it is possible to detect cracks in the institution's internal structure: illiberal motives and the exclusion of the poor being major faults running throughout its history. Before these cracks can be repaired the public library movement must surely first acknowledge the conservative foundations on which it has grown. It would also benefit from realistically appreciating the strength of the middle-class pressure exerted on the public library over 150 years.

Black's challenge was issued over twelve years ago, yet there is no evidence that it has even been seriously considered by the conservative establishment. Progressive librarianship has attempted to put into practice various practical programmes that address some of the concerns raised by Black. However, in order to make a real impact, the movement needs to take a sharper and more aggressive approach if it is to make a dent in the long-established conservative control over the service. This needs to address not only the practice of

librarianship, but perhaps more important as a starting point, the theoretical and philosophical basis of librarianship under capitalism. It is to be noted that class, class relations and class struggles are part of the capitalism which sets rules and directions for all institutions. The question then is whether, and to what extent, can one institution, in this case the library, buck the trend and free itself from capitalist power relations, capitalist values and capitalist outlook to provide an alternative service to challenge conservatism sustained by capitalism - even as capitalism itself remains in power.

The search for an answer to that question is perhaps what this book is all about. It has by no means found an answer as to how progressive librarianship can acquire the power to become the mainstream and replace the conservative service. In any case, that cannot happen in isolation in any one sector. It needs the combined effort of all activists, all organisations - in short, all the working people, to develop a new society with new power relations and different values. This is by no means an easy task, as capitalism is armed to defend itself and to defeat resistance. But that does not mean that no action can be taken until the final victory. Indeed, victory is dependent on progressive people in every organisation and profession continuing to be active in their own fields as well as in the wider social setting. Once such a progressive movement of all progressive activists achieves a critical mass and becomes the norm, ways can then be found to establish an alternative system to organise societies in a just and equitable way. In the meantime, the struggle continues; sometimes important battles are won, at other times, retreat is necessary. But in such a dynamic situation, there is progress, however uneven, towards a new society. It is from the experiences of these social movements that a new theory and a new philosophy of progressive librarianship will emerge. The experiences recounted in this book are small steps in this long struggle. They provide small pointers as to which initiatives, which strategies and which tactics are likely to succeed in a particular situation. An important lesson for progressive librarians, as for all revolutionary movements, is the need to continually reinvent themselves as the conditions and situations around them change and the balance of power shifts.

Use of language

As ideas and knowledge develop, and as practice in different fields in different countries find individual ways of addressing new and on-going social contradictions, so does language as it develops in different ways in order to satisfy needs. Clarity of thought and successful communications are lost if there is inadequate understanding of this need for dynamic language. At the same time, the use of specific professional terms and their specific meanings sometimes obscure their real message not only from other professionals, but, more importantly, from policy makers and members of the public. If this happens, librarianship, the profession in which communication is central to meeting its aims, fails to communicate and thereby breaks the essential links with other members of the society.

But it is not only in the use of professional language that the process of communication can turn into a process of non-communication. As the mainstream profession has shied away from the political aspect of its own social setting, it has allowed the use of vague and imprecise social, political and economic terms which confuse professional thinking and practice. Matters have not been helped by the conservative professions' static perspective on social dynamics and the lack of acceptance, in theory and in practice, of the dynamic and changing nature of societies and their needs. Again, it is reluctant to acknowledge the division of societies into different social and economic classes and maintains that we are all in it together, thereby serving the interests of those with the most power in societies.

It is in order to avoid obscurantism of language that some terms used in the book are defined below so as to provide a clear understanding of the issues involved.

Black

The term "Black" as used in this book relates to its context in Britain. It is used in its political sense to include all people from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean and all those who consider themselves Black. It includes those born in Britain but whose parents or grandparents came from Africa, Asia or the Caribbean. It is meant to highlight aspects that unite people on the basis of their common history of oppression. The term often used in the USA is People of Colour.

The Trade Union Congress (TUC), the trade union, Unison, and many other progressive organisations have Black sections.

Working people

The term “working people”, as used in this book, is an all-inclusive one and includes not only people in active employment, but people who are unemployed or under-employed as well. It is used to distinguish this group of people from owners of capital and resources who do not depend on their labour and employment for survival.

Generalisations

A word about generalisation in the book would be appropriate here. There are some general assumptions and conclusions made in this book. This happens when certain attributes are given to the concepts of progressive or conservative librarianship. Here, statements are made that imply that the entire progressive or conservative librarianship movements share these concerns. No scientific research has been conducted to ascertain this, and many within each movement may feel that this does not reflect their understanding of the term. Indeed many may not identify with either term and may see themselves outside the scope of either. Yet others may find that they accept selected aspects from both in a hybrid fashion.

However, such generalisations are necessary to draw a line between opposing approaches and positions by progressive and conservative librarianships. The boundaries may sometimes be blurred, but such generalisations help us better understand the main contradictions between opposing groups. What is important is to recognise that a clear difference between the two positions does exist.

Politics of information

We live in perhaps the most contradictory times in the history of the world. Today we have the means to receive instant information from any part of the world. We have the means to travel as far back as 14 billion years to the time of the Big Bang; and look at the furthest spot in the Universe that humans have ever looked at. We can look deep into the heart of atoms and even further beyond.

But this wonderful experience is interpreted for us by those who slant this information with their own perspectives and interests. This corporatized global world has taken control of inputs into our senses, so that what we see, hear, feel, smell and touch is doctored and spun to meet corporate goals of profit. A new reality is created for us so that we see what holders of corporate powers want us to see. They are after our minds and hearts.

This process does not just take place in the political field where mysterious weapons of mass destruction are found in targeted countries, and communities are targeted to be disappeared so that oil can flow more smoothly even as blood of thousands also flows. This creative manipulation of our reality takes place in our cultures, ideas and consciousness as well. Instant villains and heroes are created and destroyed to suit corporate greed. Where no enemies exist to frighten us to accept the vision of this corporate world, new ones are created – it is communism at one time, Gadhafi and Saddam Hussein at other times, jihadists, and Muslim terrorists in our own times. Recently the state of Syria has been added to the list, with an attack on Iran looming large on the horizon. Mugabe was turned into the greatest threat to world peace for attempting to redress social imbalance left by colonialism, but has since faded from our TV screen and newspapers to make room for others to take the central stage. The very language we hear and read is manipulated.

The same system created its own monsters who are allowed to kill, loot and destroy life at will: Mobutu and Idi Amin are examples at one level, and Al Qaida, the now hated terrorists, were the creation of the CIA itself. Kenyatta and Moi created their own killing fields in Kenya, but this was acceptable to their corporate masters as the country had strategic and economic value. Oppressive regimes such as in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are allowed to kill and maim so long as they meet

the economic and political interests of corporate capital. Israel is allowed to go unpunished for crimes against the Palestine people and does not even get a mention for having one of the largest arsenals of nuclear weapons in West Asia, if not the World. Iraq, meanwhile, was turned into villain for its so-called weapons of mass destruction when none existed. All this to satisfy corporate need for mega profits, power and control. Terrorist attacks by the West against civilians in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Pakistan are considered good, as they are meant to protect the West against terrorism. Drone attacks on Pakistani peasants are shown as necessary for world peace while their human right to life itself is not considered important. No rule of law, no due process of law, no innocence until proved guilty for them. Western backed mercenary consultants march into Libya and Syria in order to create friendly regimes to oppose those that refuse to toe the imperialist line.

This misrepresentation of reality is achieved largely by the mass media and the education system controlled by the same corporate forces which then turn villains into heroes and heroes into villains. An important part is played in this deception by the compliant, conservative library service which either endorses these created-realities as truths, or turns away from reality in the name of false neutrality without making any alternative news and views available.

The brave new world of TINA

We are daily presented with the view that 'There Is No Alternative' – TINA – to the present form of globalization, no alternative to austerity for working people. Inequality in the society, the suffering of millions is presented as inevitable. Social oppression and economic exploitation are made to appear as natural as the air we breathe.

It is in this context that one needs to examine the perspectives that progressive librarianship brings to understanding the information world. The challenge faced by progressive librarianship, and indeed by all those seeking to challenge the present crisis of capitalism, is that the ideology they want to change is all-pervasive and so has to be attacked not only in one or two spheres, but in the very fabric of the world which embeds a worldview supporting the corporate perspective. Varman and Chakrabati (2008) explore this aspect:

One also needs to appreciate that the dominant ideology is not acquired merely through a classroom situation with logic and arguments to support its acceptance by the majority, but that it is a much more intense process embedded in all our social, political and economic practices, in a manner that seems so natural, that one needs critical engagement to be even aware of its very existence. And therefore to *actually* question the dominant ideology and subsequently seek an alternative, has to be necessarily a very long drawn process of continuous dialogue and practice.

But this issue is not a marginal concern in our society or to librarianship today. It goes to the very heart of the system. Levy (2013) sums it up succinctly:

... the whole thrust of bourgeois ideology is that capitalism is the natural social order, and so cannot be changed.

Progressive librarianship, in essence, is challenging this capitalist natural order which it hopes to change at least in the library context. Levy (2013) also laments the present British education system and the implications of his points need to be studied by all, particularly librarians:

It is a pity that philosophy is not more widely studied in the British labour movement as it would help build an understanding that only genuine socialism can resolve the contradictions of modern-day state-monopoly capitalism.

But just as there is resistance to capitalism and the inequality it produces, there is a linked struggle against TINA as well. For example, Tony Benn, writing about the daily British paper, *The Morning Star* says:

It [*The Morning Star*] is a daily antidote to the corporate media which seeks to turn us into passive consumers and convince us there is no alternative to the endless crude operations of market forces yet, despite claims by the establishment that socialism is outdated, things that are most popular in British society today are little pockets

of socialism, where areas of life have been excluded from greed and are protected for the benefit of the community. (Benn, 2012).

But it is not only in Britain that there is a resistance to capitalism and TINA. A more fundamental challenge to these is the on-going alternative model underway in Latin America, as Milne (2013) records:

Ever since the crash of 2008 exposed the rotten core of a failed economic model, we've been told there are no viable alternatives. As Europe sinks deeper into austerity, governing parties of whatever stripe are routinely rejected by disillusioned voters – only to be replaced by others delivering more welfare cuts, privatisation and inequality.

So what should we make of a part of the world where governments have resolutely turned their back on that model, slashed poverty and inequality, taken back industries and resources from corporate control, massively expanded public services and democratic participation – and keep getting re-elected in fiercely contested elections?

That is what has been happening in Latin America for a decade ... But what is happening in Ecuador is only part of a progressive tide that has swept Latin America, as social democratic and radical socialist governments have attacked social and racial inequality, challenged US domination and begun to create genuine regional integration and independence for the first time in 500 years.

Information and its social role

A continuous stream of events, whether related to natural phenomena or to social events that reflect social and economic struggles in particular societies, take every minute, every hour, every day and every year. Power relations reflect economic power which in turn affects social, political, cultural and other aspects of social life.

Information about these events and activities is then collected, stored and disseminated by social channels of communication,

including libraries, using tools and technologies available at the particular time. This used be done by word of mouth, with older people acting as collectors and teachers of social information. In technologically advanced countries, this is now done using modern means of communication.

As societies develop and invent new tools and technologies to facilitate the production of material goods and also the flow of information, the information process itself is intensified, with its dissemination becoming increasingly efficient.

Under capitalism, there emerges a society divided into various classes, each class with its own interests, views and information to enable it to safeguard and strengthen *its* class interests against the interests of other classes. This social division is reflected in every aspect of life. It is present in all aspects of library work too. It is present among the professionals and others who work in libraries. This is a reality that progressive librarianship seeks to understand and reflect in its policies and actions.

Information in society

The role, purpose, use, controls and relevance of information in any given society provides a common theme for this book. It is taken as given that information is as much a tool as, say, a computer or a tractor. In common with other tools, information can be misused to manipulate people and to misinform them or provide a partial insight into a subject without providing a comprehensive context and history which would enable the recipients to form a rational, informed judgement on a given subject. Similarly, only partial information may be collected with the result that it provides a distorted picture of social reality. In class societies, the important point to consider is whose perspective is shown by the dominating classes and the media they control as being the reality. Interests of the corporate and political minority are projected as the interest of the entire country, the entire society and the entire world, while the social, political and economic interests of the majority of people are ignored. Classes, class divisions and class struggles are then

However, information can also be used as a tool for social, personal and national sustenance, growth and development if collected, stored

and disseminated within an appropriate context and in an appropriate form, in the required languages, at appropriate time and in appropriate form. For the information to be relevant, it should meet the needs of current as well as potential users. The needs of the former are generally better met than those of the latter. Some pointers as to who should collect and disseminate information and what type of information should be collected are given in Durrani (1980).

Jacques (2012) provides a good example of how the manipulation of information has kept many in Europe ignorant about perhaps the most significant fact of the 21st Century:

History is passing our country and our continent by. Once we were the centre of the world, the place from where power, ideas and the future emanated. If we drew a map of the world, Europe was at its centre. That was how it was for 200 years. No more. The world is tilting on its axis in even more dramatic style than when Europe was on the rise. We are witnessing the greatest changes the world has seen for more than two centuries. We are barely aware of the fact. And therein lies the problem.

While information about the relative decline of Europe is well hidden, information about the “benefits” that capitalism can bring is to be found everywhere, so efficient is the information system serving capitalism. In this situation, the challenge for progressive librarianship is to search for an appropriate information model which would meet people’s needs in a just and equitable way. For this, it needs to understand the role of information in society and explore ways of ensuring that information serves the social goals of development, equality and justice for all. This needs to be done through an interdisciplinary approach rather than seeing the information sector in isolation from its social context. Thus issues around economics, politics, development, people’s movements for liberation and resistance to inequality and the search for justice are very much part of the domain that libraries need to explore.

The search for what is relevant to particular societies at particular times is the key concern for progressive librarianship. And yet there is no fixed information that is universally relevant to all societies. What is relevant to one society at a particular time may not be relevant

to other societies at the same, or indeed, at other times. Hence the emphasis that progressive librarianship place on investigating communities and their information needs. The approaches in Kenya and Britain are not the same. This is in recognition of the reality that the two societies (Kenya and Britain) have needs different from each other. In addition, within each country, there are divisions between those make and influence policies and decisions and those who lack such power. The prevailing rules, legislation, culture and world outlook are decided upon by those with power and wealth. Castells (2012) explains the all-pervading influence that those who control power have over lives of people:

... power relationships are constitutive of society because those who have power construct the institutions of society according to their values and interests. Power is exercised by means of coercion and/or by the construction of meaning in people's minds, through mechanisms of symbolic manipulation. Power relations are embedded in the institutions of society.

Civallero (2007) points to the real power that information has when he says: "Information means power; economic power as well as social, political and human. This power has been seized by a few and is not often shared". In such situations, information policies are guided by the wants and interests of those in power. This is the background against which the book explores alternative models for a public library service.

What is appropriate and relevant information in particular situations depends on social, political and economic reality in specific communities and countries at particular times. There is thus a need to see information not only in its universal aspect, but in its particular application in specific situations. Information and its main agency for collection and dissemination - public libraries - are sometimes seen in their universal aspect, thus raising the question of their relevance to the specific needs of their societies at particular times. There is thus a need to analyse local communities and develop services that meet their needs. Conflicting needs and perspectives influence the choice made for information and library services.

Another important area for public libraries is the way information about history is collected, recorded and interpreted. Events can be seen from the perspectives of a minority or the majority. At present, information that supports the corporate, capitalist perspective dominates information services in Kenya and Britain, with all alternatives ignored, suppressed or distorted. Information services can play an important role by providing all perspectives - particularly alternative views - on historical events so as to provide a balanced and fair basis for people to reach their own decisions on past events.

While information in any society flows through various media - oral, newspapers, books, radio and TV, the Internet, social media - it is libraries, and particularly public libraries, which are the focus of this book. While there have been various changes in the way public library services are organised in Kenya and Britain over the years, the basic model has remained the same with an approach that sees libraries in comparative static terms as consisting of buildings with books and other forms of information (increasingly now with the use of computers) in the hope that the supply of these material will automatically meet the information needs of people. This is not always the case, particularly as those on the margins of social, economic and political life do not have power over the content or the supply of books and information.

From the perspective of progressive librarianship, information is not an abstract "given" attribute, like air or water. It has a social dimension and is linked to the social situation in each society at a particular time. Access to information is seen as a human right. Thus information is not seen as a collection of books in a library, but as a tool for use in satisfying material and social needs. It is a tool of "development" that people need to ensure their survival. The urgent need to redesign libraries in both countries is evident from the fact that while both the countries officially subscribe to the IFLA/ UNESCO's Public Library Manifesto (1994) as well as various human rights international agreements, their implementation in legislation and policies, and particularly in practice, leaves a lot to be desired. This is evident, for example in Britain in 2010-11 when a large number of public libraries are being closed without an assessment of the role of libraries and how the closures will impact on that role. The principles enshrined in the Public Library Manifesto thus remain largely unmet in both the countries.

Understanding the challenges facing libraries

It is in this context of classes and class struggles that one needs to see libraries as organisations dealing with information on behalf of the society as a whole. Perhaps the most important challenge facing libraries and librarians is to accept the fact that they are part of the political setup of their societies and to understand and act upon the implications of this fact. This means that their action – or inaction – in the political arena has important implications for their communities and their professional work. Libraries exist in particular political situations and librarians reflect their own particular class and social positions in the decisions they make in their professional life. In societies divided by classes, this means that the profession may often serve the interests of one class only – the ruling class whose world outlook the libraries may help to reinforce at the expense of the outlooks, visions and needs of the working class and poorer members of their communities who are marginalised from resources and power.

The question about whether libraries meet the needs of marginalised communities is, in essence, a question of whether libraries meet the needs of their communities by providing relevant services. In order to do so, it is first of all essential that there is a clear vision of what type of society, and what type of library service, one wants. Secondly, it is essential that the library knows its local communities and understands their needs. There has to be a real partnership with local communities so that library services do not appear from the skies to “deliver” a service. The service and service providers have to be part of the community before the community will accept them as one of their own. Local communities, particularly those who have been excluded, should be empowered to be active players in making policies on services and resource allocation, on service delivery and monitoring its impact. Care needs to be taken that the service is not controlled by the powerful in the community whose wants often decide on the services the library provides at the expense of the needs of the rest of the community. Too often it is the most articulate, the most politically connected and those with wealth and education who set local agenda. The need is to empower those excluded from this position of power so they become active citizens able to influence policies and practices of public institutions. The market has to be

excluded from this situation. This is best achieved in societies which adhere to, and practice, democracy as discussed below, where all classes are able to influence policies and government decisions. Thus the contradictions facing libraries can be resolved on the basis of the people currently marginalised from power achieving their share of power. For this to happen, major social changes are necessary.

Democracy deficit

Our starting point is to make some basic assumptions about our societies. The first is that we aspire to live in a democratic world where the rights and responsibilities of all are fully guaranteed and respected. But democracy often means different things to different people. We need a usable, consistent definition to be able to discuss its principles as they apply to librarianship. Here is a one useful definition:

Democracy is a system of political governance [where] decision-making power is subject to the controlling influence of citizens who are considered political equals. A democratic political system is inclusive, participatory, representative, accountable, transparent and responsive to citizens' aspirations and expectations. (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2010?).

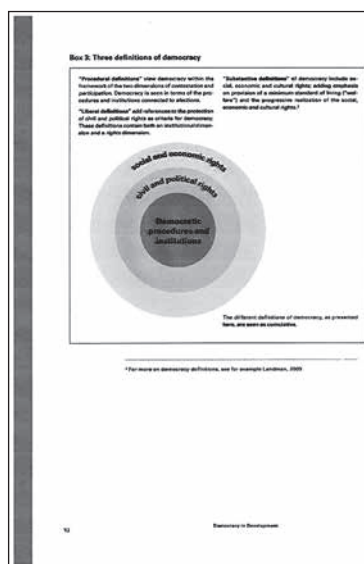
This is a useful definition for discussions on librarianship, as it goes beyond the narrow definitions of democracy focussing only on parliamentary systems dominated by vested interests. It should be a requirement for all libraries to examine their policies and practices to assess whether they subscribe to the above definition of democracy. In addition, the following chart is a useful guide to stimulate debate and discussions in libraries on democracy at various levels, with the 2nd and 3rd aspects being particularly relevant:

“Procedural definitions” view democracy within the framework of the two dimensions of contestation and participation. Democracy is seen in terms of the procedures and institutions connected to elections.

“Liberal definitions” add references to the protection of civil and political rights as criteria for democracy. These definitions contain both an institutional dimension and a rights dimension.

“Substantive definitions” of democracy include social, economic and cultural rights; adding emphasis on provision of a minimum standard of living (“welfare”) and the progressive realization of the social, economic and cultural rights

These are set down in the following diagram from International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2009):



1. Three definitions of democracy (IIDEA, 2009)

It is the third, “substantive definition” above that provides a clear point of departure for progressive librarianship as it takes us away from the conservative position of “open for all” to making it possible for the “all” to access services on an equal footing with those in position of economic and political power. It is support to achieve the social, economic and cultural rights that the library service should see as part of its mission.

This approach to democracy also help us solve another dilemma often faced by libraries: what happens when the majority vote for particular policies that discriminate against minorities? Using the above approach to democratic rights provides a fair solution. Majority votes should not overturn the rights, as defined above, of minorities. Our constitutions and rules need to ensure that rights of all are protected and this can only happen when a society is guided by principles of social justice and human rights which protect the interest of all. Legitimate rights of minority groups should be protected by library policy and national laws.

An important aspect that is often hidden in debates about democracy is that of *economic* democracy. It is easier for vested interests to allow political democracy in the form of parliamentary democracy which can then be controlled by those with massive wealth. Democracy in Britain has created an unequal society. Payne (2012) looks at the two sides of this inequality:

In Britain the ruling class is amongst the wealthiest in the world. The richest 1000 of our 62 million people own £414 billion between them. Monopoly finance capital is stashed away in secret bank accounts and offshore havens by the trillion. (Payne, 2012):

And on the other hand:

Throughout the world, women are bearing the heaviest burden of the economic crisis. Their lot is super-exploitation on a massive scale – drudgery, impoverishment, exclusion, isolation, violence and misery. In Britain too women are disproportionately affected. They are the primary victims of privatisation and the cuts. They will pay for the majority of cuts in public spending through job loss, wage cuts, withdrawal of benefits and the removal of vital caring services.

This aspect of achieving economic democracy and equality was well understood in Kenya by the Mau Mau activists, one of whose documents explained the way in which imperialism retained economic control while giving political independence:

The struggle for Kenya's future is being waged today on three distinct though interrelated levels - political, racial and economic. It seems to us that we Africans are being allowed to 'win' in the first two spheres as long as we don't contest the battle being waged on the third, all important economic level.

Since the end of the second World War, Great Britain, knowing it could not contain the wave of nationalist revolutions spreading throughout the colonial world, has embarked on a course of 'guiding' these nationalist movements down a path most conducive to the perpetuation of British and multinational capitalist economic domination. The old colonialism involving direct political control is fast dying and a quick transition to the new colonialism is felt necessary to avert a *genuine* social revolution, which would result in economic as well as political independence and thus stop the flow of Kenya's surplus capital into the banks of the western capitalist world. The British master Plan is thus quite simple in outline: "Carefully relinquish political control to a properly indoctrinated group of the 'right kind' of Africans, i.e. those whose interests are similar to and compatible with our own, so that we retain economic control." In short, the British Government wants to leave in political form so that its capitalist sponsors might remain in economic *content*. Put into slogan form, this plan would be LEAVE IN ORDER TO STAY. (Mau Mau, 1960. Capitalisation in the original).

The result of a similar lack of economic democracy is clear today when Kenya is one of the most unequal societies in Africa - and the world.

The question then is whether there is real democracy in Britain or Kenya. We all like to think that there is, but the real question is whether there is democracy for *all*. The reality is that many minority communities - and indeed majority communities in the context of economic and political power - do not share the same democratic rights that should be theirs by principles of democracy and human rights. There cannot be democracy - as per the "substantive definition" of democracy above - without equitable distribution of economic,

social and political power, without adequate income or adequate wealth. There cannot be real democracy and equality when there is inequality in wealth and income – often as a result of the manipulation of national resources or through generations of inherited wealth and privilege. In this context, it is worth keeping in mind the facts about the distribution of wealth, as shown by Davis *et al.* (2006):

- The richest 1% of adults alone owned 40% of global assets in the year 2000
- The richest 10% of adults accounted for 85% of the world total
- The bottom half of the world adult population owned barely 1% of global wealth.

The picture had not changed by 2008, as Davis *et al.* (2008) indicate:

The richest 2 per cent of adult individuals own more than half of all global wealth, with the richest 1 per cent alone accounting for 40 per cent of global assets. The corresponding figures for the top 5 per cent and the top 10 per cent are 71 per cent and 85 per cent, respectively. In contrast, the bottom half of wealth holders together hold barely 1 per cent of global wealth. Members of the top decile are almost 400 times richer, on average, than the bottom 50 per cent, and members of the top percentile are almost 2,000 times richer.

Some may say that surely things must have improved since then. But the long term trends also show no improvement in the situation. Eaton (2012) writes:

Over the past three decades the US has experienced one of the greatest redistributions of income and wealth from poor to rich in modern history. In 1980, members of the infamous “1 per cent” received 10 per cent of the national income. They now receive a quarter. In 2010, 93 per cent of the \$288bn in new US growth went to the top 1 per cent.

The erosion of democracy in Britain is highlighted by the Democratic Audit (2012):

Significantly, the findings presented in this chapter underline the extent to which levels of socio-economic inequality in the UK and the consolidation of corporate power have come to undermine the democratic sphere. The wide social divisions which we catalogue in this chapter pose serious challenges not only in relation to the UK's records in guaranteeing social and economic rights, but also with regard to the core democratic principle of political equality.

Thus the first challenge for establishing a fair and just library service is to address the question of democracy deficit in our world as a whole. The effects of inequality at a global level are then felt in Britain and Kenya as well. One result of financial deregulation was the disruption of economies in many countries. At the same time, while capital moves freely, labour is restricted in its search for employment and livelihood can no longer find in native countries. We thus have a rich world and a poor world – a North-South divide – not only in different regions of the world, but within each country as well. The situation is captured in a recent report by Oxfam (2014):

Almost half of the world's wealth is now owned by just one percent of the population, and seven out of ten people live in countries where economic inequality has increased in the last 30 years. The World Economic Forum has identified economic inequality as a major risk to human progress, impacting social stability within countries and threatening security on a global scale.

It is this national and international inequality that is then reflected in libraries and should be a priority area of concern for all librarians.

It is inconceivable that the marginalised minority communities would remain marginalised for long if they had effective power and wealth. They would then have been in a position to demand – and get – the services they need. Their marginalization is not self-inflicted. They are victims of the economic and political systems whose very foundation requires a majority of people to be poor so

that the minority can be ultra-rich. Those caught in between the two extremes are engaged in a constant battle to rise up – or at least not to sink too low. It is also important to remember that people who are marginalised are engaged in active struggles against their marginalisation and inequality. The true nature of capitalism and the struggle against it is summed up by Tony Benn:

The institutions of the state and the power structure of the economy are both riddled with privilege and they combine to deny the peoples of Britain their rightful inheritance.

The daily struggle for justice against the powerful is a democratic impulse. The important thing to remember about democracy is that we can remove without bloodshed the people who govern us and it can be used to define and shape a different future for this country. (Benn, 2012).

The question then arises about the role that librarians can or should play in order to ensure that there is real democracy in our societies, our world and in our libraries, and whether they are ready to join in the struggle to “define and shape a different future” for the country as well as for its libraries. The only way for libraries to connect with their world is to understand and respond appropriately to their struggles for equality and social justice. This is not a matter from which librarians can opt out on a pretence of “neutrality” of the profession. If the term “we are all in it together” has a meaning at all, it is in this context, since librarians are not sitting on a floating cloud removed from all social, political and economic reality. This reality not only influences the library, but the library and librarians also impact on the society in dialectical relations from which it is not possible to opt out.

If librarians are serious as professionals in providing a service to all, then they also need to ensure that they play a part in removing the social, political and economic barriers that prevent libraries from delivering an “equal” service to all. At the very least, it is their duty to provide facts and information to active and non-active users about the real reasons for inequality in our world today, for example by disseminating results from Davis *et al.* (2006) on wealth distribution. They should provide them with historical information about how this inequality came about and who benefited from it. Librarians also need to show that those who suffer inequality do not suffer it in silence.

Information about resistance to this inequality is often hidden and not generally available in our libraries. This does not include only the large events which the mass media pick up, but the daily resistance, as for example documented in the Register of Resistance (Mwakenya, 1987b). In the absence of such information, victims are often made to blame themselves for being victims. If libraries do not document this resistance, those resisting inequality find libraries alien places that neither understand their world, nor provide them with information to help them find a way out of their social oppression and economic exploitation. Providing them with token information in the name of multiculturalism does not fool them into trusting a system and a society which many see as remote and uninterested. Such is the approach of librarians who, on seeing poverty and economic injustice around them, turn their faces away from such reality with a statement that “we do not do politics” or that “we are neutral”. Their inaction is in itself a political stand, notwithstanding the loud denials from some professional libraries, organisations and individuals.

Cossette (1976, 2009) provides a succinct note on the role of libraries:

In providing needed information to all citizens, especially the most disadvantaged, the library lends its support to the realisation of democratic ideals: it contributes to the formation of an informed electorate that is capable of rational decision.

Those who are really concerned to reach out to the suffering communities should try to deliver an information service that reflects world reality from *their* point of view – and libraries will see an immediate take-up of such a service based on an alternative world view missing from most conservative libraries.

Business as usual

A significant hidden hand that manipulates and distorts public information relates to military matters. Vast resources are devoted to creating vast military industries, not only in the industrialised western countries, but in countries which do not have resources to waste on military hardware and personnel, nor any real needs. This shortfall

is filled by instigation people to fight each other through false information and propaganda warfare which makes enemies of one group against another – groups who have lived together peaceful for generations. Enemies are invented to make the acquisition of weapons “necessary”. Thus religious divisions, tribal divisions and national divisions are created to sell sophisticated weapons to both the sides. Then all sorts of aid packages are designed and delivered: military aid to purchase un-needed war material, military training, and training in the use of weapons. Military cooperation agreements are reached, mainly instigated by USA, Britain and, increasingly, Israel. These help to create Western orientation among future military leaders, many of whom then go on to take over political power too, either through military coups or via supposedly democratic elections, for example, Karzai in Afghanistan. Armies in many countries are dependent on US military aid, such as in Pakistan and Egypt, making any meaningful democratic change impossible. Thus, a new way for Western influence is opened up, as is the way for Western armament sale to countries of the South through secret military (and political) agreements. These influence decisions not only on the immediate military and political areas, but in all aspects of the subject countries’ political and international decisions, as the aid and other programmes can easily be stopped if the client state refuses to toe the line in all other matters, be it voting with the west at UN, in international trade agreements or handing over control over national resources to multinational corporations.

Information about these agreements is then hidden even from the people of the countries whose lives are affected by such agreements, and whose people – current as well as future generations – end up repaying loans and interest on loans through further loans made under unfavourable terms to purchase these unnecessary weapons. It is not only the military leaders who are thus compromised. Bribery and blackmail of political leaders is also used to encourage military and political cooperation. Examples include the sale of a high-technology radar system to Tanzania which did not even have the capacity or the need for such systems. The corruption and bribery associated with the al-Yamamah deal by BAE in 1985 with Saudi Arabia remains hidden from public scrutiny, thanks to the security concerns raised by successive British governments.

The funds for similar corruption are easily available through a

shadowy economy built up by transnational companies. There is thus no possibility of any public exposure of how and by whom these corrupt actions are undertaken and where. Christensen (2009) indicates the possibilities and resources available for such unrecorded bribery:

Over the past fifty years a shadow economy has been created that works in parallel to the mainstream economy. US government research, and research by the Tax Justice Network, reveals that around three quarters of the top American businesses use secrecy jurisdictions, and almost 100 per cent of the top European businesses do the same.

Over 80 per cent of international loans are routed through secrecy jurisdictions. More than half of world trade passes on paper through secrecy jurisdictions. Over half of the private wealth of Latin America and Africa sits in secrecy jurisdictions. \$11.5 trillion of private assets are held in offshore structures to evade tax. Most hedge funds operate through secrecy jurisdictions. Most private equity firms are based in secrecy jurisdictions. To my knowledge the entire shadow banking system is located in secrecy jurisdictions. Day by day we accumulate more evidence that secrecy jurisdictions have become a central and totally destructive feature of the globalised economy.

In every national survey to date, banks top the lists of secrecy jurisdictions users – by far. Acting with stealth they have created a shadow banking system of inter-related structures spanning different secrecy jurisdictions, often using SIVs (Structured Investment Vehicles) and SPVs (Special Purpose Vehicles) to hold assets and liabilities off their balance sheets.

If the library profession's concern about their role in free flow of information is to have any meaning, then information about such massive international corruption should be at the top of the list of the information they collect and disseminate. Had they played their professional role in this matter, perhaps the current financial crisis might have been averted.

Misinformation

Western financial, banking and industrial interests can maximise and increase annual profits only when the public is not fully aware of facts. If people had full information about health hazards of some food promoted by transnational agribusinesses; if they knew how they were being manipulated and programmed as customers of socially useless and often harmful products; if they knew the reality of who really benefits and who pays for the hidden drug price manipulation; if people knew the true legacy of slavery, not only in Africa, but in USA, among other countries (see, for example, Randall, 2006); the real cost of privatisation of public services and institutions and the so-called Public Private Partnerships deals; how even the key domains of public service, health, education, including Universities, are now being “stealth privatised” ... if the people had full, unbiased information about all these and other issues that impact on their lives, their political actions and world outlook would alter drastically. Cesar Chaves (1984) provides a clue to the real role of libraries in empowering and liberating people through information when he says:

- Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed.
- You cannot uneducate the person who has learned to read.
- You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride.
- You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore.

Information is thus used as a political tool in supporting or opposing people's search for liberation. But each side uses different content and different forms of the information they produce, document and disseminate. It is the content and relevance of information that distinguish each side in the struggle. The information services owned and supported by the corporate finance and transnational corporations focuses on entertainment, soaps, science fictions, rumours and sensationalism not only to divert people's attention from the real issues and struggles in the society, but also to advertise and promote the “good life” that capitalism can provide, always glossing over the fact that this good life is available only to a tiny minority and is sustained by the poverty of the rest of the population. News provided

by corporate media is always from the perspective of the ruling classes and their financial backers. Thus the world is divided between “us” and “them”, between the “axis of evil” especially created to support foreign wars and the “coalitions of the willing” to suppress those not in agreement with imperialism. There is no room here for any alternative views or for the world outlook of those who are not “us” or with “us”. The alternatives are never seriously analysed or explained – often not even acknowledged as legitimate differences.

On the other side are the forces of progressive movements and activists whose aim is to focus on issues that relate to material needs of the people. They make people aware of the reality behind the gloss created by the corporate media. They are interested in facts, evidence and logical arguments and critical analyses of social and political issue while asserting that to struggle against an unjust system is not only legitimate but a moral duty of people. The news of this side of the capitalist contradiction is from the perspectives of the oppressed “have nots”, the working people surviving on the margins of life while their labour and resources enrich corporations and finance capital in alliance with local elites. Their news reports on the peoples’ resistance, their ideologies and world outlook.

However, one needs to be careful not to see the information world in “black and white” terms as there is a large grey area where progressive views and perspectives are often disseminated through journals and newspaper columns which are not committed to a progressive perspective. At the same time, there are a number of influential newspapers and their websites which do not represent the interests of corporate organisation.

Hidden agenda, hidden information

Misinformation is not the only issue that progressive librarianship needs to be aware of. There is a massive industry involved with either hiding information from the public in order to prevent people from knowing how their social and economic lives are being manipulated by finance capital and corporations. Cases where real information about such cases have come to light over the last few years cover all aspects of life, ranging from finance and banking to pharmaceuticals, the environment and the very food people eat. Other areas where information is hidden

or “spun” are the real costs of tax manipulation, nuclear power, the purpose and outcomes of foreign wars, the true costs of privatising utilities, railways and other formerly publicly owned services. These are not accidental losses of information, but deliberate manipulation of information with a view to influence government and public opinion. Such activities then makes it possible for corporations and the mega-rich to increase their power at the expense of that of the people in general. Some recent exposures of how it is done has now come to light, one example quoted by Goldenberg (2013) writing in *The Guardian*:

Conservative billionaires used a secretive funding route to channel nearly \$120m (£77m) to more than 100 groups casting doubt about the science behind climate change, *the Guardian* has learned.

The funds, doled out between 2002 and 2010, helped build a vast network of think-tanks and activist groups working to a single purpose: to redefine climate change from neutral scientific fact to a highly polarising “wedge issue” for hardcore conservatives....

Whitney Ball, chief executive of the Donors Trust told *the Guardian* that her organisation assured wealthy donors that their funds would never [be] diverted to liberal causes.

Monbiot (2013) highlights how such information manipulation is then used to influence the political process and influence government policies:

In total, between 2002 and 2010 the two identity-laundering groups paid \$311m to 480 organisations, most of which take positions of interest to the ultra-rich and the corporations they run: less tax, less regulation, a smaller public sector. Around a quarter of the money received by the right-wing opinion swarm comes from the two foundations. If this funding were not effective, it wouldn't exist: the ultra-rich didn't get that way by throwing their money around randomly. The organisations they support are those that advance their interests....

They need a network of independent-looking organisations that can produce plausible arguments in defence of their positions. Once the arguments have been developed, projecting them is easy. Most of the media is owned by billionaires, who are happy to promote the work of people funded by the same class. One of the few outlets they don't own – the BBC – has been disgracefully incurious about the identity of those to whom it gives a platform.

By these means the ultra-rich come to dominate the political conversation, without declaring themselves. Those they employ are clever and well-trained, with money their opponents can only dream of. They are skilled at rechanneling public anger that might otherwise be directed at their funders: the people who tanked the economy, who use the living planet as their dustbin, who won't pay taxes and demand that the poor must pay for the mistakes of the rich. Anger, thanks to the work of these hired hands, is instead aimed at the victims or opponents of the billionaires: people on benefits, trade unions, Greenpeace, the American Civil Liberties Union.

All progressive movements can expect to be the targets of such underhand activities, progressive librarianship being no exception.

If not “progressive”, what?

An interesting feature of librarianship is that the movement that has come to be known as “progressive librarianship” has had to defend itself, its existence, and its name and to clarify its aims and vision. Such clarification is indeed a useful and necessary step for any organisation and has to be seen as a positive development. However, question posed here is why is it that the current system, to which progressive librarianship is an alternative, has never had to defend itself in the same way, having quietly assumed the mantle of a universal library system without having to declare *its* aims and *its* vision or, most importantly, to defend what it stands for, and has not even had to name itself, except in very general terms. This infers that its dominant position of power is unquestionable. As Harger (2012) says:

... the opposite of progressive doesn't even have to explain itself. But there is one thing it does have to do constantly, which is to hide or obscure the mechanisms used to maintain power, usually done via a claim to powers beyond human (god, an innate superiority, the invisible hand of the market, the consent of the electorate). It is when people become aware of the falsity of these claims that they begin to do things like declare themselves progressive.

It can then be seen that conservative librarians are not unconscious of their hold on power since they have to keep taking action in order to maintain their power. It is also obvious that they are not neutral as they claim to be, as their actions "to hide or obscure the mechanisms used to maintain power" cannot but be un-neutral. They certainly are not innocent bystanders in the struggles in libraries. Harger's point above also indicates an important role for progressive librarians: make people (and themselves) aware of the falsity of these claims made by conservative librarianship.

It is inconceivable that anything can be understood clearly without, at the same time, understanding its opposite. For example, the term "day" is not understood in all its ramifications except in understanding its opposite: "night". It is a reflection of the power relationships in the world today that the current library system has become the norm, which then does not have to compete with anything or justify itself. It represents and gets its legitimacy from the power-holders in society, and so does not need to explain itself to those outside the circles of power.

And yet this "normal" system has faced resistance in many forms over a long period of time as it has not succeeded in preventing its opposite to exist. The resistance has had a long history, sometimes without any formal names as was the case in Kenya. At other times, this resistance was clearly labelled as "progressive" such as when the Progressive Librarians Council was formed as early as 1939 by "liberal-minded people" in San Francisco (McReynolds, 1990-91). The implication of this is that people who were the opposite of "liberal-minded" were in control of the library movement. As can be expected, they were not labelled as the "illiberal library" movement, but the implication was clearly there.

If we are to understand the meaning and significance of being progressive, we need to be clear about its real meaning by understanding its opposite. The online Thesaurus (English, UK, accessed: 02-09-12) defines “illiberal” as “intolerant, bigoted, small-minded, narrow-minded, reactionary, parochial, blinkered, proscriptive, conservative.” One could add “regressive” as well, as something that does not progress inevitably regresses. Indeed, the Thesaurus defines “regressive” as “reverting, returning, degenerating, deteriorating, relapsing, backsliding”, before finally giving its antonym: “progressive”.

So it would seem that those forming the Progressive Librarian’s Council in 1939 were against all these forms of illiberalism. It is for the readers to decide what term they would use to define the current library system to which the progressive library movement provides an alternative. As for this book, it clearly sees the opposite of this as “conservative librarianship”.

The terms “conservative” and “progressive” as used in this book follow the definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). A “conservative person” is defined by the OED as:

1b. A person who conserves or preserves something; (now usually) an adherent of traditional values, ideas, and institutions; an opponent of (social and political) change, a conservative person.

The OED defines a “progressive” as follows:

Progressive: (2a). Of persons, communities, etc.: developing, changing, progressing; esp. advancing in or gaining some desirable attribute or quality; improving, or able to improve.

In librarianship there is a lack of clearly defined terminology, and this vagueness allows conservative librarians to say one thing, but mean another. For the progressive librarians, therefore, it is essential that they are clear about meaning of terms they use.

It is hoped that the conservative library movement, by being so clearly defined, will be forced into a debate about its position seen in opposition to that of the progressive library movement. Such a debate can only be healthy and provide a basis to arrive at a rational library and information service based on logic and evidence.

But what is rational? And how does it affect librarianship? Collins English dictionary defined the term as “using reason or logic in thinking out a problem”. Encarta online Dictionary defines the term as:

1. Reasonable and sensible: governed by, or showing evidence of, clear and sensible thinking and judgment, based on reason rather than emotion or prejudice.⁵

However, as Wikipedia points out, “rationality” needs to be seen in its wider context:

However, the term “rationality” tends to be used differently in different disciplines, including specialized discussions of economics, sociology, psychology, and political science. A rational decision is one that is not just reasoned, but is also optimal for achieving a goal or solving a problem.

The question, then, is what is the goal that librarianship is aiming to achieve? In broad terms, it can be to develop a comprehensive and efficient⁶ service that is open to all. The various criteria that the UNESCO/IFLA and World Summit for Information Society (WSIS) can also be used as the goals of libraries. There have been many discussions and debates about what the term “comprehensive and efficient” means. For example, see the submissions to the UK parliamentary select committee on public library closures around the term. A philosophical argument around these terms can be found in a submission by Wingate Gray and Alice Corble (2012). But such useful submissions do not seem to lead to any meaningful discussion, let alone implementation, among a rather passive profession.

In any case, the discussion also needs to include aspects of the capability approach that has raised in a number of Sen's publications.⁷ Garnham (1997) gives an indication of what this would involve:

... what the capability approach argues is the need to develop and agree more fine grained measures and indices that reflect

⁵ Encarta Dictionary, English (UK).

⁶ The term comprehensive and efficient comes from the Public Libraries Act 1964. The term has been the source of much discussion and debate in recent months, even being the basis of the parliamentary select committee into public library closures.

⁷ See for example, Sen, Amartya: (1995): *Inequality re-examined*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

what people in practice can or cannot do with these services, the benefits they do or do not derive from them, rather than measuring mere access or expenditure. We can then devise distributional policies to establish, depending on our chosen value scheme, either a common base or equality of capability.

Such a test to measure comprehensive and efficient library services would give teeth to an otherwise vague and undefined term. But a government that gets rid of even very mild standards and performance indicators in its mad rush to privatise public service is not likely to choose this route.

If we are to develop a service based on the some of the concerns in the Parliamentary Committee submissions and debates, then it is necessary to find evidence of whether the current service is comprehensive and efficient and delivers service to all as per the criteria referred to in the Committee Report. This is an important area where conservative librarianship is weak, as it gives no evidence to substantiate its claim that the service is open to all. As the research mentioned later in the book, “Open to all?” shows, the service is *not* open to all and provides evidence for its claims. Thus a rational library service would be based on facts such as these and change the service to ensure it is open to all.

At the same time much depends on how the term “comprehensive and efficient” service is defined and by whom. Other relevant factors include how one interprets the reasons why libraries were set up and how one sees what libraries should be doing in our present conditions. For the MLA (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council)⁸ (2011), delivering a “comprehensive and efficient” service is dependent on, among other things, “the council’s local priorities and financial constraints”, thereby making the service subject to what a local authority can – or

⁸ “The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) was until May 2012 a non-departmental public body and registered charity in England with a remit to promote improvement and innovation in the area of museums, libraries and archives. Its functions spanned the UK and it advised the government on policy and priorities for these areas in England, receiving funding from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

“On 26 July 2010 it was announced [by the Conservative-led Coalition Government] that the MLA would be abolished under new proposals ... to reduce the number of public bodies funded by government. Its functions relating to museums, libraries and archives were transferred on 1 October 2011 to the Arts Council England”. Wikipedia. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Museums,_Libraries_and_Archives_Council [Accessed: 05-10-12].

wants to – afford with the possible result that poorer areas would then have an inferior service to the wealthier ones. No mention here of national library standards or maintaining a certain quality of service for all. Matters are not helped when the MLA includes the “entrepreneurial” criteria in its definition of the term “the best libraries” (MLA, 2011). So, if financial and business interests *can* take priority over people’s needs, then they *will* and that seems to be perfectly agreeable to the MLA – and to the market-driven British government too. It is fortunate that there are alternative voices to challenge beliefs. For examples, look no further than editions of the journal *Progressive Librarian* published over the past twenty years. But we do not live in a rational world, and such seemingly common-sense solutions cannot be implemented if there is an unequal distribution of power. Thus the conservative library system uses the excuse of financial constraints to maintain the status quo. And that also means that the need for progressive librarianship will remain urgent, demanding a rational service for people, not for profits. For this to succeed, progressive librarians should be aware of the danger of being imprisoned by the small-box mentality that conservative librarianship creates for them. They should not be totally caught up in the small, local, daily battles that can drain energy and resources. Instead, they need to pay equal attention to the broader social context, to the politics and the dynamics of power in society and reject the narrow neutrality arguments to become ever more active in the struggle for information. The significance of this struggle is not only in the library and information field: it is for people’s world outlooks, it is for their livelihoods, it is for equality and justice in society, and ultimately it is for life itself.

The problems are fundamental and institutional

There are fundamental problems facing the world of libraries in Kenya and Britain. They have been created outside the libraries in the society at large and have seeped in through the doors and windows of the imposing library buildings. Here they have often found favourable conditions to take root.

The problems relate to a gradual take-over of societies by private good/public bad ideologies propagated by finance capital, corporations, and from within governments. This trend has affected libraries both directly and indirectly: directly by entire services or

parts of its important functions being taken over by private companies operating primarily for profits, not public service.

In this corporatized world, the term “conservative librarianship” is not even mentioned; indeed it is not seen as “conservative”, but as the universal option, with no space and recognition for alternatives, even in the realm of ideas and dreams. The conservative library system is made to appear as the only possible way of managing social information; it is the only system taught in schools of librarianship and over the years has become the normal, the mainstream, and the only possible form of accepted librarianship. Any whistle blowers who challenge this representation of reality are condemned as biased, left-wingers, dreamers and perhaps as agents of communism and as terrorists. Thus, Julian Assange is forced into exile and thousands of other information activists fear to practice what they believe in; activists of the Occupy movement seeking an alternative world are attacked physically by the militarised forces protecting the corporate world. And the persistent message is that we are all in this together, that there are no alternatives to the social systems that end up impoverishing millions and creating ever more billionaires, that libraries are open to all. Such a spun-reality suppresses any search for alternative perspectives and arguments are replaced by non-evidenced truths which cannot be challenged – whether on monarchy, on religion, on the economy, or on rational use of information for development.

However, any field that ultimately promotes suppression, oppression and persecution will face resistance. In health, in social care, in education, in social policy, the free, de-regulated market advocates face resistance from millions who face starvation and suffering under a free-for-all system created to benefit the few. In the same way, conservative librarianship is challenged by progressive librarianship.

But in order to win, the progressive perspective needs increased and better documenting and recording. Its message of hope and promise of development for all can easily be drowned by the loud noise around the *status quo* and its TINA (There Is No Alternative)⁹

⁹ Wikipedia explains the term: “There is no alternative (shortened as TINA) was a slogan which Margaret Thatcher, the conservative British Prime Minister used often. In economics, politics, and political economy, it has come to mean that “there is no alternative” to economic liberalism, that free markets, free trade, and capitalist globalization are the best way for modern societies to develop” Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/There_is_no_alternative [Accessed: 08-10-12].

proclamations from the advocates of conservatism. The battlefield then shifts to the communication world. If the message and vision of progressive librarianship are not well documented, if its achievements are not available as source material in schools of librarians, if its possibilities are not seen by policy makers, if the people themselves are not aware of this workable and proven system of meeting their information and learning needs, then it is as if it does not exist at all. Then the voice of conservative librarianship is the only one people hear.

And that is where this book fits in. It seeks to record that which remains hidden, even when information about it is readily available. The achievements of progressive librarianship in some countries are better documented than that in other countries. It is perhaps better known in the USA, but Kenya does not register as a country with a progressive librarianship tradition. Yet it is perhaps true to say that Mau Mau activists could not have carried out a strong war of national liberation against British colonialism in the 1950s and 60s without the practices which can only be described as progressive librarianship. Similarly, the resistance of all Kenyan nationalities against colonialism for a century could not have been waged without practicing aspects of progressive librarianship. And the same applied to all resistance movements against colonialism and imperialism. However, such practices were not then described as in this way. Some aspects of such practice in Kenya are described in the author's earlier books (2006, 2009).

But progressive librarianship faces another hurdle before it is accorded its due recognition. Its achievements and successes, even when accepted as positive, are often claimed by conservative librarianship as their own achievement, even when they opposed it in the first place. It suits their purpose to refuse to see the guiding hand of progressive ideas behind these achievements. This was the case in Britain where the activities and achievements recorded in this book are not seen as those of progressive librarianship, but of the traditional, conservative service. The struggle then takes place at two levels: first, to create ideas and develop practice along the progressive model. The second level then is to liberate information about these ideas and practices so they do not get distorted into aspects of conservative service or get misrepresented as failures and attacked as not practical and as being unworkable so as to discredit them. It is an aim of this book to liberate this information about such practices in

Kenya and Britain, and to give them their correct recognition as ideas and practices of progressive librarianship.

A claim will perhaps be made that as “progressive librarianship” did not exist at the time when the nationality resistance¹⁰ movements and Mau Mau resistance were active in Kenya, then their activities cannot be described as progressive librarianship. This would be like saying that there was no democracy before the term “democracy” was invented. Practice often takes place before language and terminology catches up with the practice. That does not prevent the actions from fitting into the pattern of the trend which comes to be recognised only later. It should, in fact, strengthen the progressive librarianship movement to know that its practices were taking place in regions of the world and at times not previously recognised. It has, indeed, a long history to fall back on. What may be lacking is information about its existence among the wider world.

The term should also be seen as a dynamic one. Its ideas and practices change with time and in different situations. What was progressive a hundred years ago will not necessarily be progressive today; what is progressive in Kenya today may not necessarily be progressive in Britain today. The essence of progressiveness is that it is dynamic and changes with changing circumstances. Every revolution needs a relevant information system to ensure success. Experiences of one revolution a hundred years ago can be relevant and progressive even today if they enable today’s social justice activists to meet their goals. Thus the experiences of the Bolsheviks and the Chinese revolutionaries were progressive and relevant to the work of the Library Cell in Kenya, as evidenced by their document, *Publishing: an annotated bibliography and study guide*, examined later in this book. Yet it is not possible to merely replicate these earlier experiences without a creative reinterpretation of the essence of the earlier lessons so as to make them relevant and progressive in the

¹⁰ “Nationality resistance” refers to the resistance of Kenyan nationalities (previously referred to as “tribes”) to British colonialism in Kenya. Such resistance was based on individual nationalities since the colonial administration had banned nation-wide organisations. Examples of nationality-organisations involved in anti-colonial resistance include the Kikuyu Central Association, the Ukamba Members Association, Kavirondo Welfare Association. Prominent anti-colonial leaders included Me Katilili (from the Giriama nationality at the coast), Koitalel (Kalinjin from the Rift Valley) and Waiyaki (Gikuyu from Central Kenya). Each nationality movement developed its own information and communication system as part of their anti-colonial strategy.

current situation in order to bring about social change. In keeping with Marx's comment that "the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it",¹¹ the need is not only to understand library reality, but to change it so that libraries meet the needs of people.

While conservative librarianship conserves the same library policies and practices in different circumstances and in different countries, the progressive one changes and adopts them to current situations. That is the reason that the official library service in Kenya reproduces library practices better suited (it is supposed) to the British situation.

As Europe and USA face an ever deepening financial and social crisis, it is appropriate to question prevailing ideas, visions and practices that have fundamentally failed people in ensuring they have access to the resources they need for civilised life. The crisis removes any complacency there may have been about the need for better social and economic systems. The crimes of the British and European Empires during the colonial period as well as those by USA and UK with their "coalition of the willing" in Iraq and Afghanistan in recent years are all part of the same system of corporate greed that has created financial ruin of countries and unemployment and starvation for many millions of people in Europe and USA today – something it has been doing for the South for generations. The urgency for understanding the whys and the hows of this failed system was never greater than now; the urgency of creating a new vision, a new social system based on equality and justice was never greater than now. In this search for new beginnings, libraries can play a new role in combatting complacency and conservatism and instead provide ideas, visions and experiences that can help people liberate themselves from forces that imprison their minds in outdated formulas and wisdom. Progressive librarianship is capable of playing this critical role. This book, it is hoped, can perhaps play a small part in people's journey to liberation, equality and justice.

¹¹ Karl Marx (1845): *Theses on Feuerbach* (Thesis XI).

Progressive librarianship in context

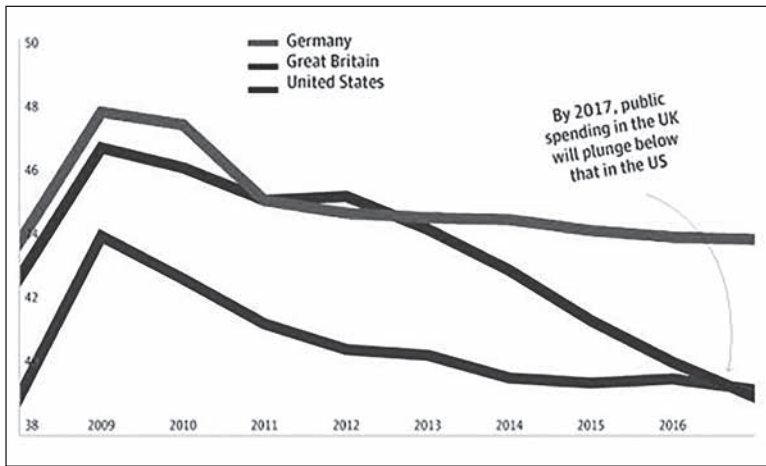
Librarianship is often seen by conservative librarianship as a discipline that stands outside its social context. This position is sometimes disguised as being neutral. It is, however, rarely declared in policy documents but remains an unstated assumption which then influences all its theories, policies and practices. Progressive librarianship, on the other hand, sees it as being part of the overall economic, political, social and cultural situation which influences librarianship, just as librarianship, in turn, influences the overall situation.

Entire countries and their economies have changed dramatically in the last five years or so. The social fabric of many societies is changing as ordinary, working people face harsh conditions, and meeting their material needs is becoming increasingly challenging. This inevitably affects libraries too, yet the conservative library profession is doing exactly the same things they always did. They cannot, or do not want to, see social and economic trends in their own countries or globally. While the very ground under which they operate is experiencing major tremors, they turn their faces away and carry on as if it is not their business, claiming that they do not do politics. Yet, hundreds of libraries are closing, thousands of library staff are losing their jobs, services are decimated and the very nature, role, purpose and functions of libraries are changing. Public-owned libraries are being given over to communities without resources, professional staff or any required standards of service or any equality requirements. As they inevitably decline over a period of time, the way then opens for the private sector to take over the profitable bits, leaving the rest of the social aspects to wither away. Even CILIP warned of the danger of “headlong rush to create more community managed libraries”. (CILIP, 2013). Yet the business of conservative librarianship goes on as usual.

That is not the case with progressive librarianship. It sees the danger; it connects with other progressive forces and movements; it stands ready to defend libraries, services and jobs from the onslaught launched by corporate and financial power-holders on the public sector. It sees the danger posed by current trends of government policies influenced by a hoard of corporate consultants.

Having removed from their horizons the need to understand and be active in the political sphere, conservative librarianship fails to see the long-term impact of current trends. Those who do not want to see social and economic trends and do not want to understand where society is going cannot defend libraries, nor can they have a vision of a library service working in the interest of the majority of people in a rapidly changing situation. They fail to note perhaps the greatest change in Britain today which affects libraries directly. One cannot fight today's battles, as conservative librarians are doing, with ideas and weapons from an age that has long gone. One cannot fight today's battles without a clear understanding of evidence-based awareness of what is happening in the society today. And what is happening to Britain today is a massive, once-in-a-lifetime sale of the public sector to private corporate interests that see public service only through profit-tinted glasses. Chakraborty (2012) provides evidence to show that "Britain will have a smaller public sector than any other major developed nation". Few conservative librarians address such facts in their policies and practices:

Drawing on IMF figures published last week, the graph [see below] compares what will happen to government spending in Britain up to 2017 with the outlook for Germany and the US. And what it shows is that the UK will plunge from public spending on a par with Germany in 2009, to spending less than the US by 2017. Had France, Sweden or Canada been included on this graph, the UK would still come bottom. If George Osborne gets his way, within the next five years, Britain will have a smaller public sector than any other major developed nation.



2: Government spending as % of national GDP

Chakraborty (2012) sounds a warning:

Prepare yourself for welfare to be downsized into American-style workfare, for public-sector jobs to be turned into a second-class employment and for services, from school to healthcare, to demand that users pay more to get something decent. The future is American.

Librarians who do not see the writing on the wall and do not act to support their libraries will be helping those who seek to downsize the state, and with it shrink the number of libraries, reduce the number of librarians and in effect change the very meaning of the term.

But the danger was seen by progressive librarians a long time ago. Libraries today face the danger seen by D'Angelo (2006) as emanating from "postmodern consumer capitalism" which "threatens the public sphere of rational discourse". He warns that "government policy makers have missed the most important function of a public library, which is to promote and sustain the knowledge and values necessary for a democratic civilization".

While it is necessary to identify the problems that can destroy the very fabric of public libraries, it is also necessary to understand and challenge the social and economic system that gives rise to the problem in the first place. What O'Toole (2012) says about the banking system

in UK, also applies to the library sector: “the problems are fundamental and institutional”. An intensified free market and deregulation in the last 30 years or so have created a culture of greed, extreme individualism and grab-all- you-can mentality among the small percentage of people at the top of the power and corporate pyramid. The problems facing the NHS, the education sector, the railways, are all part of the larger picture which affect the library service too.

The background to this situation is the global corporate capitalism whose manifestation is captured by Burnett (2011):

The modern world is ruled by multinational corporations and governed by a capitalistic ideology ... Corporations seek to maximize return on capital by leveraging productivity and paying the least possible amount for taxes and labor. Corporate executives pledge allegiance to their directors and shareholders. The dominant corporate perspective is short term, the current financial quarter, and the dominant corporate ethic is greed, doing whatever it takes to maximize profit. The world GDP is \$63 trillion but multinational corporations garner a disproportionate share.

Understanding this culture is fundamental to understanding what ideas and pressures impact on public libraries as part of the same system and culture. Privatisation of public services has a huge social cost, not only in running down the service and increasing cost to citizens, but also in creating a world outlook where individual values take precedence over social ones. It is instructive to look at the railway system in the UK to see where the rush to privatisation and deregulation has landed the country, as the same forces affect libraries too. The independent Transport for Quality of Life (2012) report states the truth:

The UK’s privatised railway is failing society, the economy and the environment, whilst draining taxpayers’ money into the pockets of private shareholders. Common sense and expert railway knowledge have ceded to a misguided private-must-be-best ethos, leaving Britain with a fragmented dysfunctional railway system that other countries view with disbelief.

The forces that have driven the railway system to this sorry state are present in all aspects of life. Internationally they are supported and promoted aggressively by the World Bank-International Monetary Fund-World Trade Organisation troika. Thus the privatisation and free market agenda has been pushed for decades by the troika in countries such as Kenya and the disjointed society that we see in UK today has been in the making in Kenya at least since independence in 1963.

What Chakraborty (2012a) says about the banking sector applies with equal force to the library and information sector: "Financial reform is not about technicalities, but about politics: deciding what role banks should play in an economy, and what kind of economy we want". It is the politics of librarianship that is missing in the mainstream, conservative librarianship and which the progressive librarianship movement seeks to restore. Burnett (2011) examines the information and communication aspects of this world controlled by finance capital, and more importantly, resistance to it:

And while the world may not be one big village in terms of lifestyle, it shares an image of "the good life" that's proffered in movies, TV, and the Internet. That's what teenagers in Afghanistan have in common with teenagers in England; they've been fed the same image of success in the global community and they know it's inaccessible. They are angry and, ultimately, their anger has the same target -- multinational corporations (and the governments that support them).

In this situation, public libraries, as other public institutions, have come under increasing attacks from forces seeking to privatize as many state institutions as possible. In Britain, the government seeks to carry out swift privatisation of the NHS, the Post Office and education services, among other institutions.

The question facing public libraries is what role they have in this rapidly changing world. The conservative model of public library is facing challenges it cannot respond to. At the same time, over the last 30 years or so the alternative model – progressive librarianship – is becoming increasingly the only system that can respond to the

needs of the present times. As the capitalist crisis intensified, the progressive librarianship movement started taking took roots in different parts of the world, as shown by Samak (2004).

The starting point

The end of the Cold War in 1991 marked a period of rapid changes in the lives of people in Europe and USA. Whereas in Africa and in most former colonies, finance capital had already taken a total grip over lives of the people, taken control of all resources and made the state its tool, Europe and USA had a semblance of freedom for peoples and their states. The end of the Cold War signalled the end of the “freedom project” and ushered in a period of rapid marketization. The next 20 years can, in many ways, be seen as a period of “commodification of everything”¹². This also affects much of Western political and economic thinking which has seen marketization as the only way of organising societies. “Over the past three decades,” Sandel (2012) writes, “markets – and market values – have come to govern our lives as never before... The most fateful change that unfolded in the last three decades was ... the expansion of markets, and of market values, into spheres of life where they don't belong.” Stating an important point that “markets are not morally neutral”, Lanchester (2012) quotes Sandel:

The question of markets is really a question about how we want to live together. Do we want a *society* where everything is up for sale? Or are there certain moral and civic goods that markets do not honour and money cannot buy?

This question perhaps provides an understanding of one of the reasons for the growth of the progressive librarianship movement in the last 20 years or so as a challenge to the passive acceptance of market forces by conservative librarianship.

In the information world, the battleground became the ethos of justice and a belief in public service versus corporate profits and

¹² The term is used in a number of fields, see, for example, Ball, Stephen (2004): Education for Sale! The Commodification of Everything? King's Annual Education Lecture 2004. Institute of Education, University of London. June 17. Available at: <http://sys.glotta.ntua.gr/Dialogos/Politics/CERU-0410-253-OWI.pdf> [Accessed: 09-11-13].

inequality based on corporate and finance capital's demands for super profits. There thus developed a "disconnect between the professed library values and the business-driven information machine" (Bossaller, Adkins and Thompson, 2010). In this situation, Bossaller, Adkins and Thompson (2010) point out, "information science cannot be a neutral science; it is laden with values, as is any science" (p.35). Harger (2010) shows the two sides the on-going battles on the choice facing librarianship: "In the pages of PL [*Progressive Librarian*], readers have found critical analyses of the ways in which librarianship either supports power structure status quos or joins in opposition to them as allies to liberatory social movements". The former is the position of the conservative, regressive librarianship and the latter is the position of the progressive librarianship movements.

Progressive librarianship implies an activist agenda, one aspect of which is to increase awareness among information workers and among the people about social, political and economic reality, about the need for change from today's power relations. It sees librarianship as "an arsenal of democracy" (Harger, 2010) serving the cause of justice and equality for all in the society, particularly those oppressed and exploited under the current system.

Progressive librarianship critically examines current assumptions about society and history. A fact that is often ignored, because it is so obvious and is "everywhere" is that we live under capitalism and all our assumptions and ideas are influenced by this fact. The society under capitalism is distinguished by sharp class contradictions and class struggles. The agenda of the recent Occupy is an indication of this social divide. This reality of living under capitalism also influences our thinking and world outlook. As Mao Tse-tung (1937) said, "in class society everyone lives as a member of a particular class and every kind of thinking, without exception, is stamped with the brand of a class". And yet capitalism, using all its social, cultural and media tools, seeks to make us oblivious to this significant fact. Thus, any shortcomings in, say, meeting food needs in socialist countries are shown in the capitalist world as failure of socialism, but similar failures under capitalism are made to appear as faults of individuals, of belonging to particular race, gender or religions but never as failures of capitalism. Similar blindness also ensures that people remain ignorant of resistance to capitalist exploitation or dismiss such

resistance as acts of terrorism, or tribal and primitive acts of backward people. Conservative librarianship joins with popular mass media and education system on this bandwagon, which reinforces this distortion of reality and history. It is no surprise that one of the areas under attack from the Conservative-led coalition Government in Britain today is the teaching of world history, thus removing imperialism and its past and on-going exploitation from awareness of new generations. Progressive librarianship, on the other hand, seeks to educate people on the history and social reality from the wider, bottom-up perspective of working people and those oppressed by centuries of misrule. The differing approaches have important implications for the collection policies of all libraries.

At another level, capitalism instils in people's minds the notion that there is no alternative – TINA – to capitalism, that capitalism is not only the only possible system of organising production and distribution of material wealth, but that it is also the most “progressive”¹³, and that whatever went before capitalism was not fit for purpose. This would be correct if the purpose is to maximise the capital accumulation for a small minority. But it is not, and this concept is kept well hidden, as if the poverty, inequality and all the associated sufferings that capitalism imposes on the people of the world were acts of nature about which we can do nothing. The powerlessness that capitalism instils in people is the most damaging aspect of our current financial system, which progressive librarianship seeks to address.

The fact that progressive librarianship developed within a capitalist system is also relevant. Thus, while the movement challenges many manifestations of inequality and powerlessness imposed by capitalism, it too sometimes falls into the trap of not questioning many of the fundamental assumptions that are commonplace these days. One such is challenged by Wallerstein (2011) when he states:

It is simply not true that capitalism as a historical system has represented progress over the various previous historical systems that it destroyed or transformed.

¹³ Indeed, the very term “progressive” has been co-opted by the right so as to appear to be progressive while propagating a conservative agenda. The battle at the level of language-use is yet another one that progressive librarianship needs to fight.

This point has important implication for progressive librarianship as one of its responsibilities is to seek, store and disseminate lost or hidden information. This aspect is taken up in a number of articles in the author's 2008 publication *Information and Liberation*, many of which were written in the context of conservative information systems and in the liberation struggle in Kenya. Wallerstein (2011) takes up the argument with regard to agriculture which is a primary activity for people's material survival:

We never seriously discuss how much knowledge we have lost in the world-wide sweep of the ideology of universalism ... at the simple technical levels of agricultural productivity and biological wholeness, we have been discovering of late that methods of human action discarded a century or two ago (a process enforced by enlightened elites upon backward masses) often need to be revived because they turn out to be more, not less, efficacious. More importantly, we are discovering at the very "frontiers" of advanced science the tentative reinsertion of premises triumphantly discarded a century, or five centuries, ago.

This has relevance for the library field as the dash to innovate often takes the form of discarding everything done in the past in the mistaken belief that everything new is better than everything old. Sometimes such false innovation involves re-inventing an old and usually failed idea, giving it a new garb and presenting it as new, radical and innovative without any debate about its relevance or efficacy. In this context, one needs to re-examine the concept of progress in its different uses, to assess its real meaning and the real danger to society from a mindless rush to meaningless innovation and so-called progress. And it is worth keeping in mind the fact that under capitalism, even the concept of innovation has been distorted to maximise corporate profits. As Wilby (2012) warns:

For many companies, skilful marketing of products that aren't significantly different from what preceded them has replaced innovation. It's cheaper and less risky to convince customers that something is ground-breaking, even when it isn't, than develop something truly innovative.

In short, rent-seeking is now far more lucrative than innovation that delivers social benefits. The big rewards go to directors and executives of large companies – and financial traders, the ultimate rent-seekers who impose an unproductive tax on invention, investment and hard work across the world.

Progressive librarianship represents an attempt, at one level, to mitigate some of the worst elements of capitalism as they relate to information and the organisation, purpose and vision of public libraries. At another level – which is certainly not accepted by all progressive librarians which includes many varying shades of opinion – many activists seek to challenge the very system that creates conditions for a library service which is simply not able to meet the information needs of people to develop in the widest possible sense. Thus the progressive librarianship movement can encompass varying shades of views and aspirations between these two points. However they all tend to agree that the current, conservative system is not a suitable system for meeting people's needs. This, however, is not a closed subject as on-going discussions seek to clarify and define what progressive librarianship is and what practices can best meet its aims. It is a strength of progressive librarianship that it has not become a stylised closed subject but is subject to re-defining and re-examining its vision, its purpose and critically examining the means of achieving its goals. In this sense, it is a living, dynamic concept which relies on using an open space for debate and discussion in order to arrive at consensus.

The politics of information – a brief case study

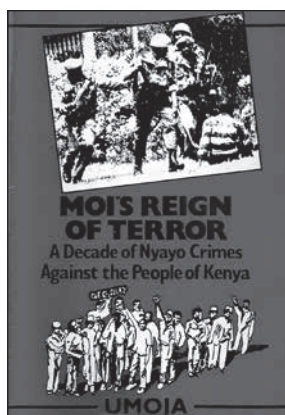
Information always has a political aspect to it, even when it is hidden. When the political of information is hidden from people, it does not cease to exist nor does it cease to exert political influence. Thus, Thatcher and Blair sought to keep from public domain the corrupt military deals between BAE and Saudi Arabia. The official reason given for not revealing this information was “state security”. Whistle blowers and investigative journalists exposed the underlying corruption that the politicians – and their financial backers – were too scared to reveal. Had the democratic tradition of progressive journalism been absent, information about the corrupt deals would

have remained hidden for at least 30 years, if not for ever. Similarly, the revelations of Wikileaks would have remained hidden but for the action of some pioneering activists.

Keeping information hidden from the public is a tactic used not only for protecting and promoting corporate interests. It is also used to destroy the political careers of progressive politicians who are seen as threatening the interests of imperialism. Before the free availability of the Internet, emails, blogs and mobile phones, politicians reached their supporters through the mass media, mainly newspapers and radio and TV. While politicians who supported or tolerated multinationals were allowed to use these media freely - indeed offered favourable opportunities - progressive politicians who opposed capitalism and imperialism found their access to the media barred.

Here we take a brief look at how politics and information interacted in Kenya to show the close links between the two. In the years following independence in 1963, few progressive politicians had control over radio broadcasts and mass newspapers which were controlled by (usually foreign) elite who also control the Government. This tight control over media ensured that news of repression, massacres and sufferings of people remained hidden. Below we look at how this stranglehold over information was breached by progressive political and library movements.

Moi's reign of terror exposed



3. **Moi's Reign of Terror** (Umoja, 1989)

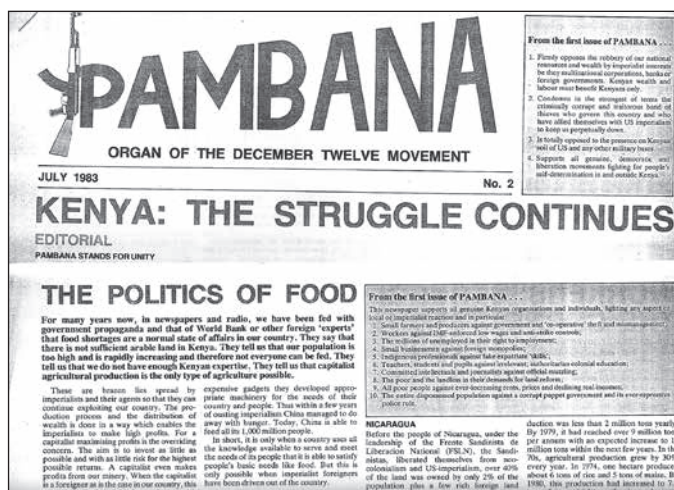


4. **InDependent Kenya**

The liberation forces, particularly, the underground December Twelve Movement, learnt lessons from earlier struggles for independence in Kenya. They learnt how the liberation forces during the war of independence set up their own information systems and developed a variety of means of communicating within the organisation and with their supporters and people in general, some aspects of which are documented in Durrani (2006).

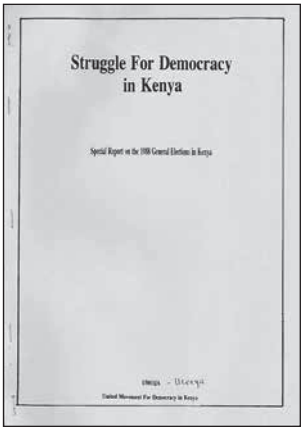
Independence in Kenya did not end this suppression and censorship of progressive ideas, ideologies, individuals and political parties. In fact, censorship increased as the “independent” government sought to suppress anybody questioning their use of colonial laws to impose policies inherited from the colonial period which supported international finance capital. Indeed, the laws on establishing and running newspapers and printing presses were strengthened to suppress alternative voices and visions.

While the attempts to silence the voice of progressive Kenyans did contribute to the destruction of opposition political movements and their leaders, their voice could not be silenced entirely. The progressive political movements, together with their newspapers, monographs and periodicals, merely continued operating from the underground. Underground pamphlets, books and newspapers continued to be produced and distributed throughout the country. Some examples are *InDependent Kenya*, a book on the political situation in the country, later republished in London by Zed Press (1983) and the newspaper, *Pambana, Organ of the December Twelve Movement*.

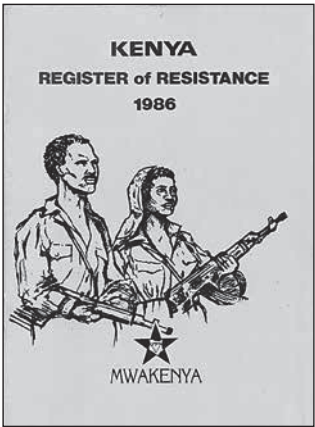


5. The Politics of Food (Pambana 2)

The Kenyan example highlights another significant development in times of the emergence of global network of organisations when it became difficult to operate within Kenya. A new phase of globalisation had indeed begun. In an earlier period, the colonial administration managed to suppress and isolate the Mau Mau activists as they had not fully developed external links. But by the 1980s, the situation had changed. When repression intensified under Moi following the coup attempt in 1982, overseas Kenyans formed political organisations in various African countries as well as in Europe, USA and Scandinavian countries where Kenyans had taken refuge. They came together under the umbrella of a new political organisation, Umoja-Kenya in 1987. Besides supporting the underground Mwakenya-December Twelve movement in Kenya, Umoja-Kenya as well as the London-based Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners in Kenya published a large number of documents, magazines and newsletters. Some of the most important ones were the *Struggle for democracy in Kenya: special report on the 1988 general elections in Kenya* (1988) and *Moi's reign of terror: a decade of Nyayo crimes against the people of Kenya* (1989). The latter as well as *Register of Resistance* used information supplied by underground activists in Kenya, making it available not only to people in Kenya through locally-established distribution networks, but the international communities as well.



6: Struggle for Democracy in Kenya (Umoja)



7: Register of Resistance (Mwakenya) 1986

Ref.	INDUSTRY	TOWN	No of WORKERS	ACTION	DEMANDS / ISSUES Etc.
8.1	Alcan International	Nairobi	2000	Strike	Right to security of employment
8.5	Kenya National Assurance Co.	Nairobi	500	Strike	
8.9	Kenya Ports Authority	Mombasa	1000	Protests	Struggle against 'Colonial practices' clocking machines
8.10	Kenya Breweries Ltd/Insurance Guards Co.	Ruaraka Nairobi	900	Strike	Struggle against low wages, poor working conditions
9.1	Nyawa Construction Co.	Samburu District	50	Strike	Right to be paid regularly
9.4	Bamburi Beach Hotel	Bamburi	[30]	Strike	Struggle against oppressive management
9.9	Richard Engineering Works	Nairobi	[50]	Strike	Right to be paid regularly
10.3	Kenya Ports Authority	Mombasa	200	Strike	Struggle against unjust work schedule
10.8	Alcan International Ltd.	Nairobi	200	Work stoppage	Right to security of employment (see 8.1)
11.2	Simba Cuts Motors	Nairobi	70	Strike	Struggle against clocking machines
11.3	Hotel GPO	Nairobi	200	Strike	
11.5	Kenya Railways	Mombasa	400	Strike	Struggle against new work rates of 12 hours' work
11.9	Kenya Railways	Mombasa	400	Strike	Non-implementation of agreement (see 11.5)
11.10	Mel International AD part	Mombasa	200	Protest	Struggle against compulsory Harambo wage lay-off (see 11.5)
12.3	Energy Project	Garbura, Dera, Kibera	1000	Strike	Solidarity with 2 workers sacked
12.4	Yokos Textile Industries	Thika	177	Strike	Right to regular payment & wages
12.7	Nakuru Construction Co.	Nakuru	150	Demonstrations	Right to be paid wages regularly

12

Ref.	INDUSTRY	TOWN	No of WORKERS	ACTION	DEMANDS / ISSUES Etc.
12.8	Kenya Ports Authority	Mombasa	12000	Strike	Struggle for increase in wages
12.9	Valentia Footwear Manufacturers	Nairobi	40	Strike	Struggle for wages & overtime to be paid on time

13

ANALYSIS OF STRUGGLES OF INDUSTRIAL PROLETARIAT - 1986

NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	65
NUMBER OF WORKERS	42,527
NUMBER OF TOWNS	44

8. Pages from the Register of Resistance (1986)

In a significant way, these publications, particularly *Moi's Reign of Terror*, had important impact on the history of Kenya as it exposed the repressive rule of the Moi-KANU regime with fully documented records of massacres, political murders, jailing, disappearances and exiling of activists, as well as those caught in the security net cast by the Special Branch when they could not identify activists.

No longer was it possible for Moi to visit world capitals without facing questions from Kenyan exiles and journalists, as well as human rights organisations, about the killing of Kenyans as well as corruption and misrule. It also supported and encouraged people in Kenya to carry on with their struggles for liberation in the knowledge that the world focus was on them. This level of challenge to the regime would not have been possible without the availability of the information that the underground activists produced.

This shows the central role that information can play in people's struggle for liberation and democracy. The production of such information was supported by librarians as well as political activities within the underground movement in Kenya and overseas.

Progressive in a conservative world

Information and libraries are part of a social and political system that provides an overall umbrella under which they exist. This umbrella is so all-encompassing, it is often not seen, and conservative librarianship tends to ignore its presence altogether. It is like ignoring the air we breathe as it is everywhere and is not seen, but it is the very essence of life. Ignoring the social reality is tantamount to condoning the inequality and injustice that the system has created. It is in this sense that politics is seen to be at the centre of progressive librarianship. For progressive librarians, the overall social, political and economic context in which libraries function is all-important. This is shown, for example, by the Progressive Librarians Guild in USA (PLG) which in many ways is a pioneer of what has come to be known as "progressive librarians" today. This, of course, is not to deny the contributions that various progressive movements in USA and Europe have made with similar aims and plans of action. The concepts that PLG advocated at its formation in the editorial in the Preview edition of *Progressive Librarian* (1990) provide a good basis of understanding the concerns that motivate librarians to seek a progressive alternative to conservative librarianship and develop new thinking along progressive lines. At the same time, they encompass many of the themes developed in Kenya and in Britain that are discussed in this book – often with varying degrees of emphasis to different aspects at different times. It is therefore instructive to see the agenda that PLG set out with:

Why have we called ourselves “progressive”? The term has been abused, misunderstood, ridiculed. In America it has stood for a whole range of political perspectives, but what we want it to mean goes back to the its roots at the turn of the century, when to be progressive meant to be in favour of people and suspicious of corporations, to be in favour of economic democracy and against monopolies and imperialism. We want our name to call to mind the reforming impulse of the early decades of this century, but also to encompass the best of activism of the 1930s and of the radicalism of the 1960s, when hopes of a better world were not dismissed out-of-hand as utopian and impractical. Our small band ... refuses to accept what now exists in libraries as inevitable and unchanging. We believe that to be a professional librarian means to think critically about what we do and to help to create the kinds of libraries that reflect society’s highest ideals. (*Progressive Librarian*, 1990).

This definition guides the thinking behind the concept of progressive librarianship as used in this book. “To be in favour of people and suspicious of corporations”, as PLG puts it, is perhaps the essence of progressive librarianship. But this automatically takes one to the political field which, in turn, takes us to study capitalism and what and how it has moulded our current society. Thus in order to understand what the concerns of progressive librarianship are, it is necessary to understand the main features of capitalism and how they impact on all aspects of life, including information and libraries. Different countries face different threats which reflect their own particular situations. If one agrees with Monbiot that “imperialism never ended”, then we also need to re-examine the social reality of libraries within a capitalist system in specific situations. He says:

The bid for power, oil and spheres of influence that Bush and Blair launched in Mesopotamia, using the conservative camouflage of the civilising mission; the colonial war still being fought in Afghanistan, 199 years after the Great Game began; the global policing functions the great powers have arrogated to themselves; the one-sided justice dispensed by

international law: all these suggest that imperialism never ended, but merely mutated into new forms. The virtual empire knows no boundaries. Until we begin to recognise and confront it, all of us, black and white, will remain its subjects. (Monbiot, 2012)

Progressive librarianship seeks to recognise and confront the marginalisation of majority of people that capitalism causes as its *modus operandi*, particularly its intensification of “commodification of everything”, as explained by Wallerstein (2011):

Historical capitalism involved the widespread commodification of processes – not merely exchange processes, but production processes, distribution processes, and investment processes – that had previously been conducted other than via a “market”. And in the course of seeking to accumulate more and more capital, capitalists have sought to commodify more and more of these social processes in all spheres of economic life. Since capitalism has been a self-regarding process, it follows that no social transaction has been intrinsically exempt from possible inclusion.

Social and other forms of information have always been a target for corporations and finance capital which rule capitalist societies. This became even more important with the rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the last thirty years or so. The growth of the progressive library movement in USA and Europe coincided with these developments of ICT when not only the consciousness about the harmful social effects of commodification of information began to be more widespread, but also the new ICT technologies themselves made it possible for progressive librarians to link up with like-minded individuals and organisations, nationally and internationally. Progressive librarians are not alone in the search for a new society based on principles of peace, justice and equality for all. They have many natural allies. As Tony Benn (2012) says: “It is in this battle for peace and socialism that we are, truly, all in it together”.

Imperialism and its impact on society as a whole, and on libraries in particular, were the main concerns in Kenya, whereas they were hidden

in Britain under the false impression created here that imperialism had nothing to do with the current British situation. But concerns for ensuring real democracy and justice were common to both the situations.

In Kenya, as well as in many other countries in Africa and elsewhere, the “commodification of everything” has been an on-going process ever since imperialism saw them as sources of cheap labour, raw material and markets for products from Europe and USA. The process continued, and perhaps intensified, when the colonial phase ended and finance and corporate capital’s need to control the nominally independent countries increased. This was achieved through taking control of the economies of entire countries and regions, by controlling the ruling classes and, through them, controlling all processes of production and distribution of material value. Thus “the commodification of everything”, including that of politicians, professionals and the ruling elite, was at its most intense level in these countries. Monbiot (2012) connects the past and the present of the methods used to achieve control over peoples and countries:

Decolonisation did not take place until the former colonial powers and the empires of capital on whose behalf they operated had established other means of retaining control. Some, like the IMF and World Bank, have remained almost unchanged. Others, like the programme of extraordinary rendition, evolved in response to new challenges to global hegemony ... in the 1980s and 1990s ... it [IMF] forced Asian countries to liberalise their currencies, permitting western financial speculators to attack them – the IMF’s prescriptions are incomprehensible until they are understood as instruments of financial power.

But at the same time, there is resistance to this imperialist adventure. And it is this resistance that capitalism – and its conservative information services – seeks to distort or keep hidden from the people. Yet where the struggles against capitalism is at a high level, the related struggles for alternative information services that resist the mainstream are also at a high level. This perhaps explains the growth of the progressive information and librarianship movement in Kenya,

not only in the period covered in this book but throughout the colonial phase. It intensified during the Mau Mau war of national liberation when liberation information systems, language and forms of delivery were developed to counter the practices developed by the colonial system.

Thus, in some cases, the vision and practice of progressive librarianship started before its name became commonplace. Where the capitalist contradiction was the sharpest the struggle for a free flow of information was more advanced. Some aspects of this search for a people's alternative to capitalist information-for-an-elite, in the context of the Kenyan liberation struggle, were mentioned in the author's 2006 book, *Never be Silent*. Some of its later manifestations are included in this book, particularly under the sections dealing with the December Twelve Movement's Library Cell. Thus the language to describe the movement – "progressive librarianship" – developed *after* the actual practice had been in use for many years. Other terms have also been used, perhaps with some differences in emphases. These include terms such as radical librarianship, information for social change, community librarianship. Black and Muddiman (1997) provide a good background to the development of such groups and initiatives in the UK.

In the Kenyan case, the very need for liberation struggles against colonialism required a "progressive" and alternative approach to information practices so as to ensure success in the struggle against colonialism. But it did not develop from any textbooks: theories and practices were developed in the course of practice in the field and battlegrounds. This fact points to yet another difference between the conservative librarianship and the progressive one: the former remains more or less static as it develops an information system for the elite – political, economic and cultural – while the latter changes to meet growing needs as it develops an information system that meets the requirements of people in general. The examples quoted in this book, for example, the Library Cell, Quality Leaders Project, Library Skills Project, were designed to meet the changing information needs of those ignored by the "mainstream" capitalist system.

As already outlined, the term "progressive", as used in this book, needs to be seen in terms of its opposite, "conservative librarianship", which accepts as given the power and social relations in society as dictated by capitalism. The term "conservative librarianship" is seen here as the mainstream approach used in Kenya during the

colonial and post-colonial period. The term “nationality librarianship” is sometimes used to describe the system developed by over forty Kenyan nationalities, to meet particular information needs in their struggles against nature, as well as to satisfy material needs in their resistance to colonialism. This system was further developed by the trade union and nationalist organisations during the Mau Mau war of national liberation and this also influenced the activities of the Library Cell of the December Twelve Movement covered later in this book. It is possible that had this progression continued after independence, Kenya could have developed a relevant, progressive system that could have met people’s information needs in a comprehensive way and posed a direct challenge to conservative librarianship.

There is, however, no universal agreement of what constitutes a “progressive” library service. Overall, the PLG definition quoted earlier and the Ten Point Programme (2000) mentioned later in the book can be seen as an important approach to what constitutes “progressive” – and that is generally the approach taken in this book. But this again does not imply that every “progressive” librarian accepts all these points. Again, “progressive” needs to be seen in its local context, as what is progressive in USA today need not necessarily be progressive in the Kenyan context in the 1980s or indeed even today. The social, economic and political context matters, as does the contemporary stage of the conservative library system against which the progressiveness is compared. The term “conservative” can best be understood in its context of preserving the current power and social relations (possibly with minor superficial changes to make it appear that it is keeping with changing times). On the other hand, the progressive movement seeks to change the library status quo by seeking changes in the current system and by empowering those without information power.

Again, the progressive library movement may not necessary define itself as progressive, but the term can be applied retrospectively if the actual practice meets the criteria along the lines of the PLG definition and the Ten Point programme. The key distinguishing feature of the two systems is whether it understands social forces at a given time, whether it seeks to develop a role that seeks justice in every field and seeks equality and democratic rights for all people, both in theory and practice.

This book does not confine itself to a narrow definition of “progressiveness” but sees the movements and initiatives in its own context as opposing the There is No Alternative (TINA) approach of the conservative library system sustained by capitalism. In keeping with varying conditions and needs, various terms have been used to describe an alternative system, such as critical librarianship, progressive librarianship, community librarianship, liberation librarianship, barefoot librarianship etc. It is beyond the scope of this book to analyse these various terms and movements these terms refer to. But a few examples can perhaps suffice to indicate the range of ideas covered in some of the terms used. The Progressive Librarians Guild Midwinter Meeting (2012), for instance, held a discussion on the topic “What is critical librarianship?” Views from several people were presented. Toni Samek says:

Critical librarianship is an international movement of library and information workers that consider the human condition and human rights above other professional concerns.

Elaine Harger says:

Those practitioners engaged in critical librarianship seek, in both theory and practice (1) to expose the means through which the library wittingly and unwittingly supports systems of oppression (whether they be physical, emotional, spiritual, systemic or personal) and, conversely, (2) to promote the library, its services, and collections as a means of liberation for individuals, communities, and society at large. As of January 2012, the editorial policies of the following journals (print and online) can be considered as embodying critical perspectives as defined above: *Progressive Librarian* (US), *Information for Social Change* and *Library and Information Science Critique* (UK), *BiS* (Sweden).

Harger’s perspective, which is in line with the perspective used in this book, leads to an important reality that is of fundamental significance in discussions on librarianship: the politics of information that is at the basis of all theories and practices of the profession. The political

perspective and the power relations in a society are what determine social contradictions and these in turn determine the struggles in the library field. It is here that forces of conservative and progressive librarianships fight it out on ideas and practices. One cannot understand these contradictions and struggles without an understanding of the facts about such social struggles. It is for this reason that progressive librarianship, as understood in this book, insists on the need to carry out concrete investigations of the social reality of a particular library. A relevant service can then be planned and delivered to meet the needs identified in the investigation. It is in this context that Mao's advice to communists has relevance for librarians as well:

Unless you have investigated a problem, you will be deprived of the right to speak on it. Isn't that too harsh? Not in the least. When you have not probed into a problem, into the present facts and its past history, and know nothing of its essentials, whatever you say about it will undoubtedly be nonsense. Talking nonsense solves no problems, as everyone knows, so why is it unjust to deprive you of the right to speak? Quite a few comrades always keep their eyes shut and talk nonsense, and for a Communist that is disgraceful. How can a Communist keep his eyes shut and talk nonsense? (Mao, 1930).

Conservative librarianship has undertaken no meaningful investigations that have influenced policies and practices. Progressive librarians aim to avoid this approach.

At the social level, the term "progressive", as used in this book, implies a need for the development of a society to "progress" towards social justice and equality for the majority of people currently marginalised. It implies a moral approach to meeting people's needs. It also implies that a progressive librarianship supports society in being able to satisfy the material needs of its entire people. "Progress" implies that no group oppresses or exploits the labour and resources of another group. Thus progressive librarianship seeks to maximise what Wallerstein (2011) defines, in a related context, as "equality and equity, one that increases humanity's control over its own life (democracy) and liberates the imagination".

A vision, an organisation and some challenges

An important requirement for a progressive librarianship to be effective is the need for developing a vision of a just and equal information (and hence overall) society. Beyond the vision, there needs to be an organisation that seeks the attainment of the vision. As the attainment of the vision involves an active struggle against the status quo, there needs to be a strategy and appropriate leadership that can help to deliver the vision. Progress is also not seen as a linear journey from A to B, but sometimes uneven progression towards the attainment of the vision. For all this, an activist approach is needed and this requires there to be a balance between ideas, theories and vision on the one hand and practice to test and implement these theories, on the other. There is thus a process of learning lessons from the experiences, modifying ideas on the basis of the experience and returning to practice with new or modified ideas. Progressive librarianship does not sit on the fence in the struggle between the status quo and the emerging progressive ideas and practice. As Howard Zinn says, "you can't be neutral on a moving train", and information services perhaps need this to be clarified more than many other professionals as they influence people's thinking and world outlook – and hence actions.

If one assesses the achievements of capitalism against the above criteria of developing a vision of a just and equal information (and hence overall) society, one finds it lacking. As a historical comparison, capitalism has failed in major ways, irrespective of the propaganda, from populist media as well as from "learned" academics. Yet facts provide irrefutable evidence of the real achievement of capitalism for the majority of people. Wallerstein (2011) assesses the "progress" of five hundred years of capitalism:

The overwhelming proportion of the world's work-forces, who live in rural zones or move between them and urban slums, are worse off than their ancestors five hundred years ago. They eat less well, and certainly have a less balanced diet. Although they are more likely to survive the first year of life (because of the effect of social hygiene undertaken to protect the privileged), I doubt that the life prospects of the majority of the world's population *as of age one* are

greater than previously; I suspect the opposite is true. They unquestionably work harder – more hours per day, per year, per lifetime. And since they do this for less total reward, the rate of exploitation has escalated sharply.

In this situation, what should one see as “progressive” is an important question which needs to be seen in the context of resistance to capitalism which is not obvious from the above quote. One problem facing the progressive librarianship movement, in common with other progressive political and social movements, is that the conservative sector takes on “progressive clothing” so as to appear at one with the people. But within their “progressive clothing” the essence of the old, oppressive structures and vision remains hidden. They thus seek to divert people’s resistance to one that is managed by the *status quo* in the same way that the “revolutions” in Iraq, Libya and Syria are managed by the US corporate empire. Also under attack by the *status quo* is leadership of progressive movements which are then often isolated, neutralised and discredited, thereby weakening their organisations, one of the key weapons that people have.

As indicated above, in order for progressive librarianship to have an impact, it needs to have some form of organisation. This is partly achieved by working in partnership with other progressive movements to create a common front to wage joint battles. In the case of Kenya, the Library Cell worked in a political partnership with the December Twelve Movement as well as with progressive worker, peasant and student organisations. In order to be effective, it had an activist agenda. This activist aspect is what distinguishes progressive from conservative librarianship. In the example of the Three Continents Liberation Collection (TCLC) in Britain, it was a partnership with progressive units and individuals within the Council as well as community and national institutions that formed partners of the progressive movement.

The progressive librarianship movement is sometimes attacked for not fulfilling its aims and of “failures”. Thus, many of the projects mentioned in this book and in the author’s 2006 book “Information and liberation” can be attacked as “failures” because they did not survive or because they did not achieve 100% of their visions. Such successes and failures need to be seen in the context of the social and political times we live and work in. As Wallerstein (2011) explains:

... all forms of anti-systemic movements, as well as all revolutionary and/or socialist states, have themselves been integral products of historical capitalism. They are not structures external to the historical system but the excretion of processes integral to it. Hence they have reflected all the contradictions and constraints of the system. They could not and cannot do otherwise.

In this context the system itself has actively subverted the operations of the progressive movement, creating difficulties and obstructions so as to make it fail. For example, the USSR was forced to devote large resources to military and related expenditure in the face of on-going threats during the Cold War from the Western powers. This diverted resources from social and economic development contributed to the downfall of USSR. In the same way, efforts and energies of progressive librarians has to be spent on “useless” work to defend their positions, thus taking their attention away from their substantive work.

At this point, it may be beneficial to examine some views on what constitutes “progressive librarianship”. Birdsall (2006-07) says:

One obstacle is that there is considerable ambiguity about just what constitutes progressive librarianship. According to Toni Samek, it is known in North America as socially responsible librarianship, activist librarianship, or radical librarianship (Samek 2004). As a consequence, “... progressive library discourse reflects the divergent voices on the margins of librarianship...” that includes, according to Samek, “... a range of viewpoints on a continuum that spans from an anarchist stance to varying degrees of a social responsibility perspective”

Birdsall (2006-07) mentions six “components of a progressive librarianship”. What seems to be missing from Birdsall is a concern with the very context which has given rise to conservative librarianship: *capitalism*, which underlies all aspects of life. Also missing is a reference to resistance movement against capitalism, particularly in the information field, which has given birth to the progressive librarianship movement.

Progressive librarianship: the international context

There has been much discussion in recent years about the alternative, progressive and other related movements, particularly in the USA. This coincides with the world-wide resistance anti-capitalist movements which arose in response to the manipulation of the global financial system to further impoverish working majorities while enriching a tiny minority.

However, the essence of progressive librarianship is captured in a short document that emerged following an international meeting of progressive librarians in 2000. This was the "Ten Point Program" whose tenets are central to the progressive movement. It is worth reproducing it here as there is a danger that in all the new documents emerging in the library world today, this key document may be forgotten. It also needs to form the basis for training all professional librarians.

Ten Point Program presented to the groups which met at the Vienna Conference of progressive librarians sponsored by KRIBIBIE

1. We shall work towards an international agenda as the basis of common action of librarians everywhere actively committed, as librarians, to social justice, equality, human welfare, and the development of cultural democracy.
2. We will unite librarians and information workers in opposition to the marketization of public goods, to privatization of social resources and to outsourcing of services and will oppose international treaties and institutions which advance destructive neo-liberal policies.
3. We insist upon the equality of access to and inclusiveness of information services, especially extending such services to the poor, marginalized and discriminated against, including the active solidarity-based provision of information assistance to these groups and their advocates in their struggles.
4. We shall encourage the exploration of alternative models of human services; promote and disseminate critical analysis of information technology's impact on libraries and societies; and support the fundamental democratization of existing institutions of education, culture, and communications.

5. We shall undertake joint, interdisciplinary research into fundamental library issues (e.g. into the political economy of information in the age of neo-liberalism and corporate globalization) in order to lay the basis for effective action in our spheres of work.
6. We will support cooperative collection, organization and preservation of the documents of people's struggles and the making available of alternative materials representing a wide range of progressive viewpoints often excluded as resources from the debates of our times.
7. We will investigate and organize efforts to make the library-as-workplace more democratic and encourage resistance to the managerialism of the present library culture.
8. We will lead in promoting international solidarity among librarians and cooperation between libraries across borders on the basis of our joint commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related covenants which create a democratic framework for constructive cooperative endeavours.
9. We will organize in common with other cultural and educational progressives, to help put issues of social responsibility on the agendas of international bodies such as IFLA and UNESCO.
10. We shall oppose corporate globalization which, despite its claims, reinforces existing social, economic, cultural inequalities, and insist on a democratic globalism and internationalism which respects and cultivates cultural plurality, which recognizes the sovereignty of peoples, which acknowledges the obligations of society to the individual and communities, and which prioritizes human values and needs over profits. (Ten Point Program, 2000).

It is noteworthy that the organisations coming together in 2000 had a long history of library activism with a radical programme. While their history remains outside the scope of this book, a brief look will provide a useful background to this record.

Sweden

Wettmark (2001) records the birth of BiS:

BiS was formally started in 1969 at the Library School, at that time situated in Solna, outside Stockholm. It happened during the theoretically oriented final year of the library students training. It was a time of transition. A new generation of students and workers, fuelled by the possible emergence of a new society, organised themselves by protesting, striking and by establishing new left wing organisations. Those were anti-imperialistic, anti-capitalistic or simply critical. Many professionals were for shorter or longer periods organised in socialist groups. Socialist School Workers for instance released books on where to find critical literature if you were a teacher in literature and wanted to counter-educate your students.

Its mission today remains the same (available at: <http://foreningenbis.com/foreningenbis/>, accessed: 15-03-12)] BiS is a growing and developing organisation and responds to changing situation with updating its mission. It thus sees the current situation facing libraries as:

Supranational trends in the EU constitute a potential threat to the Scandinavian model by requiring deregulation, new copyright applications, and that library services be defined in market terms, not by cultural policies.

*

Germany

Akribibi (Arbeitskreis Kritischer BibliothekarInnen, or the Working Group of Critical Librarians) was another participant in the 2000 Vienna Conference which came out with the Ten Point programme mentioned above. It has now been succeeded by Kritische Bibliothek (Critical Library) whose website at <http://www.kribiblio.de/> [accessed on 16-03-12] is "as an open, multi-disciplinary discussion forum for exchange of information, views and possibilities". "Our goal", it adds, is "to provoke thought and develop activities that contribute to a critical

advancement of librarianship". It seeks to do this by, among other ways, by introducing "radical theories and with suggestions for social change strategies". It thus retains its position among the progressive librarianship movement.

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USA

Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG)

An editorial in PLG sets out the reasons for the birth of the progressive movement in USA:

We saw in our libraries the move towards commercialization, we saw "marketing" or "merchandising" enthusiastically embraced as a "strategy" for public library development, we saw our main forum, *Library Journal*, moving towards the world of controlled market circulation where the line between advertising and articles disappears. In short, we saw that the line behind which the library stood as a moral and educational force in society was being breached by the tide of fads of the American way of doing business. (*Progressive Librarian* preview edition, 1990 front cover).

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Occupy Wall Street

A glimpse of what a relevant, progressive library movement is capable of is provided by the "Occupy Wall Street" movement in USA – as well as its related movements in other parts of the world. McLemee, Scott (2011) reports:

... They are the "guerrilla librarians" - the people organizing and distributing books and periodicals to keep the demonstrators informed and entertained. A library was established in Zuccotti Park at the very start of the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations, and it has received a good deal of attention. Several more sprang up as the protests spread.

The Occupy Wall Street Library site [<http://peopleslibrary.wordpress.com/>] provides a useful record of the aims and the development of the People's Library. This shows that the profession is ready to take on the challenges posed by the current economic and political situation around the world and in the process develop a progressive library service that is relevant to the needs of the majority of people.

Samak (2004) provides a good summary of the history of the development of progressive librarianship:

Progressive librarianship (also known in North America as socially responsible librarianship, activist librarianship, and radical librarianship, and in Europe as critical librarianship) has a tradition that dates from the late 1930s in the United States (U.S.).

Dating back to 1939, with the introduction of the Progressive Librarians' Council Bulletin, progressive librarianship has produced its own vehicles of discourse with a network base in Argentina, Austria, Germany, Mexico, South Africa, Sweden, the U.K., and the U.S. This discourse gained significant momentum in the late 1960s/early 1970s in the U.S. and elsewhere in the 1980s. In the last decade, the decentralized and multidirectional technology and communications infrastructure of the Internet has greatly enhanced relationship building, grassroots democratic organizing, and the development of "new citizenship groups" around the discourse and practice of progressive librarianship.

Samak (2004) provides a useful "chronological formation of key progressive library groups around the world" which is a useful contextual material for the initiatives mentioned in this book:

- 1939 Progressive Librarians Council (PLG), U.S.
- 1969 Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) of the American Library Association (ALA), U.S.; Bibliotek i Samhälle (BIS), Sweden
- 1983 Arbeitskreis kritischer Bibliothekarinnen und Bibliothekare (KRIBIBI), Austria

- 1988 Arbeitskreis Kritischer BibliothekarInnen (AKRIBIE), Germany
- 1990 Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG), U.S.; Library and Information Workers Organization (LIWO), South Africa
- 1994 Information for Social Change (ISC), U.K.
- 1997 Social Responsibilities Discussion Group of International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), International
- 2000 Círculo de Estudios sobre Bibliotecología Política y Social (CEBI) - International; Study Circle on Political and Social Librarianship, Mexico
- 2001 Progressive Librarians' International Coalition
- 200? Grupo de Estudios Sociales en Bibliotecología y Documentación (GESBI) -- Social Studies Group on Librarianship and Documentation, Argentina.

There is a big gulf between what progressive librarianship aspires for and what the conservative librarianship seeks. Klein (2004), addressing a meeting of librarians, sums up the fault line which divides progressive librarianship from the conservative one:

When I look out at this room I see people who represent values that are distinctly different from the ones that currently govern the globe. These values are, in no particular order:

- Knowledge (as opposed to mere information gathering)
- Public Space (as opposed to commercial or private space), and
- Sharing (as opposed to buying and selling)

It so happens that those are three of the most endangered and embattled values you could have chosen to represent. If you decided to represent "profit" or "global competitiveness" your lives would be easy. But you didn't, and the very notion

that some things that are so important, that cannot be fully owned and contained, is under siege around the world.

It will be seen that there is a definite gulf between the approach taken by the two opposing systems, progressive and conservative librarianship. Further, the emergence of the progressive strand is not confined to one country or to one part of the world. It arises out of the dialectics of the political, social and economic situation where forces of capitalism are daily engaged in battles with those opposed to its agenda. Libraries are not immune from these forces and reflect the larger struggles taking place in societies as a whole.

A personal perspective

From theory to practice, practice to theory

The first part of this book examined a number of concerns and issues that have guided the development of progressive librarianship in Kenya and Britain. Part 2 looks at the practice of transforming some aspects of the conservative library service into a progressive service and empowering staff to implement them. It can be summed up as a process of turning progressive “ideas into action”.

In some cases, existing, conservative practice and services were changed qualitatively; in other cases, new services were developed to meet new or unmet needs. These needs were established by a process of investigation of local situations and consultation with affected communities. The experience detailed in this section, particularly in the section on Kenya, indicates a need to develop “progressive political librarianship” – i.e. to include the political aspect to the study of libraries. As the conservative librarianship supports the conservative political system, it provides library and information service to the conservative political system only. The progressive political sector remains outside the remit of conservative librarianship. Nor are schools of librarianship likely to develop teaching and learning programmes in political librarianship. However, many trade unions run activist training programmes for trade unionists and these could inform new courses in progressive political librarianship. Similarly, there are a few programmes in social activism and these can be combined with political and

information aspects as a basis of training programmes for progressive political librarianship. Further, such courses could be informed by the practical and experiences of librarianship gained within political organisations such as the ones of the Library Cell discussed later.

Looking back to go forward

For progressive librarianship to develop and “progress”, it is necessary to learn from experiences of other countries and people, particularly in revolutionary situations and periods of intense social change. That the Library Cell produced an annotated bibliography on publishing experiences during the Bolshevik and Chinese revolutions was no accident. It was a pointer for librarians that one needs to learn from experiences of those who have gone before us in a process of “looking back to go forward”. The knowledge gained by others then become the idea-base to develop new services today. The experience of implementing these ideas generates yet more ideas which form a bigger pool of ideas to be used by future generations.

The experiences recorded below are, at one level, personal perspectives of involvement in “progressive librarianship experimentation”. At another level, they are social laboratories for other people in other situations as reservoir of knowledge to inform their current plans and practice. This process highlights the close links between history and geography and progressive librarianship – an aspect that needs further exploration in professional studies.

At the same time, the process of ideas informing practice, and practice reinforcing ideas is what makes progressive librarianship a scientific endeavour in the sense that it uses the scientific method of evidence-based work. This is when an objective set of theories, based on evidence and not on wishes, thoughts and whims of “leaders” and power-holders, informs practice. This is when conservative librarianship transforms into progressive librarianship.

This highlights the importance, indeed the necessity, of developing and recording practice and experiences as otherwise ideas and theories can get lost and not available to others. It is for this reason that the following section gives details of the experiences, the struggles and the contradictions faced by those involved in developing new practices of progressive librarianship.

The Kenyan experience

It is not intended here to provide a comprehensive history of public libraries or librarianship in Kenya. However a very brief historical review from 1930s to 1980s would help to better understand what needs to be done and the extent to which the progressive librarianship activities mentioned later provided a break from the status quo.

Kenya has had a long history of information work, book production and publishing, with the Kiswahili literature and book production active over many centuries. Some aspects of this were considered in Durrani (2006a).

Kenya had a number of formal library services long before independence in 1963. The Seif bin Salim Public Library and Free Reading Room in Mombasa, established as early as 1903, can be seen as the first public library in Mombasa. Gregory (1991) quotes sources saying that it was not only “the oldest library but also the oldest inter-racial institution in East Africa”. While it was open to all races at a time when racial public services were the norm, its content reflected the needs of the South Asian communities more as the “philanthropic efforts and funds came from the Indian communities” (Musisi, 1984). The material was in Gujarati, Hindi and Urdu, with some material in Arabic and Kiswahili. But it also carried material in English, particularly newspapers, which opened it to speakers of other languages. IFLA/FAIF (1999) sees one reason for the “bias in favour of Indian clientele only” as the “socio-economic and political conditions of the time”.

The Macmillan Memorial Library in Nairobi started in 1931 as a subscription library and was for use by the European community only. The library was taken over by the Nairobi City Council in 1962.

The Desai Memorial Library in Nairobi was set up in 1944 and “during the fifties they (the Desai Memorial library, the reading room and the Hall) were open to all peoples, and Africans became the main participants. In 1962, the library had about one thousand active members” (Gregory, 1991). There were other libraries set up by the various South Asian communities, for example, the Rahemtulla Trust Library, “an Ismaili organisation [which] constructed a public library building in Nairobi in 1953”. (IFLA/FAIFE, 1999). The Trust set to acquire books that would be representative of all the subjects and to allow readership of all walks of life regardless of creed, colour or religion” (IFLA/FAIFE, 1999).

While the above libraries can be considered as “public” libraries, they were not state run or state-funded although some of them did get some Government financial support. They were initiatives from various communities and had differing policies about who can make use of them, as noted above. The position of the Colonial Government in terms of public library provision is summed up by IFLA/FAIFE (1999):

During the colonial period, the colonial government felt the need for information, which could help in finding out how the colony could be financially self-sufficient. There was a need to use some Africans in governing and so they had to educate them. On one hand they wanted to control the amount of education so that Africans did not have the ability to confront the colonial government. The colonial government did not support creation of public libraries. On the other hand, Africans realised that their development lay in a European type of education and that they needed access to information.

The colonial administration addressed one aspect of a public library service, in terms of meeting the needs of popular literature, by appointing Elizabeth Huxley in 1945 to report on how these needs could be met. Following her recommendations, the East African Literature Bureau (EALB) was set up in 1948. This operated by the provision of

“book boxes” and a postal lending service to about 40 centres. EALB was also a publisher.

However, the EALB was not a statutory library service. The 1958 East African Library Association conference resolved that “statutory library boards be set up in East Africa” (IFLA/FAIF, 1999). Sidney Hockey was appointed by the British Council “as the library organiser for East Africa” (IFLA/FAIFE, 1999). The Kenya National Library Service Board Act was passed in 1965.

While it is not within the scope of this book to look at the historical development of public libraries in Kenya, it is instructive to examine the thinking behind the setting up of a public library service under the influence of colonialism. Rosenberg (1993) provides a good analysis of the development of public libraries in Kenya. Also instructive is the development of libraries in the immediate post-independence period which created the basis on which the public library service functions to this day. IFLA/FAIF (1999) provides a succinct summary:

While granting independence, the imperial powers still hoped to assert some influence over their former colonies and retain their interests. Britain felt that an informed populace would most likely maintain democratic traditions and would be most open to western influences. For this reason it supported establishment of libraries and training of librarians.

This aspect of continuing colonial influence is also mentioned by Rosenberg (1993):

It [the British Government] had admitted that full independence under African majority rule was inevitable. Its policy now [at the time of the Lancaster Conference in 1960] was to ensure the continuation of British influence after independence and to encourage the new rulers to maintain colonial structures.

This blows away the myth promoted by conservative librarianship of the so-called neutral public library that colonialism is supposed to have left in Africa. Thus at the time of independence, Kenya was on

the way to “becoming part of the world capitalist system” (Rosenberg, 1993). Maintaining western interest was what drove British colonialism to establish public libraries but the period after independence has also seen no significant change in the vision of a public library service which has remained indifferent to the development of people or the country as a whole. IFLA/FAIF (1999) summarises the situation decades after independence:

Since the Kenya National Library Service started in 1967, it has only managed to set up libraries in all provincial headquarters and in the a few districts. This is short of their objective, which was to build libraries in all districts by 1980. The book stock of the existing libraries is also largely outdated.

It goes on to set the library service in its national context:

The majority of the population lives in rural areas. It is estimated that 70% of the libraries, 80% of the book stock and 90% of periodical subscriptions are located in Nairobi. This area contains about 6% of the total population.

Rosenberg (1993) sums up the main reason for the failure of public library service in many parts of the former colonial Africa:

Kenya National Library Service was therefore a creation of the departing colonial state. It did not have its roots in Kenyan society. Rather than being an exercise in national building by indigenous forces, the public library system was part of the state structures left behind by the departing colonial power ... it is therefore not surprising that ... public libraries in Africa have failed to grow and develop symbiotically with society, and that libraries have not played a significant role in the social development thinking of African governments.

A background discussion on the relevance of library services implied in the above quotes can be found in the author’s article, “Independence in Kenya and the lost opportunity to build a people-orientated library service” (Durrani, 1998). A few key points from it can be reproduced here:

One key question was whether the libraries and information services should be organised for the working people or were they for the rich elite ... Thus at the time of independence in Kenya in 1963, the information needs of the majority had already been assigned to a second class status. All formal and official information and mass media reflected the economic and political interest of the new ruling class which served the economic interests of imperialism.

The article maintained that "the struggle for a relevant information service is intimately linked with the political struggles of the people for organising a society that ensures that material, social, cultural and political interests of the people are met". It is this very aspect which the conservative library service does not want to see or explore. Progressive librarianship's great contribution to the development of theory and practice of librarianship is to re-establish the link between political and information struggles. It is this that provides a crucial dividing line – a real point of departure – between the two opposing approaches to librarianship today.

Libraries reflect social struggles

As with all social activities, the library and information sector reflects the on-going struggles in a society. In the Kenyan context, the struggle at the larger political, social and economic level was between those who snatched state and economic power after independence in Kenya on the one hand, and those who lost out in the "independence settlement" – the working people who lost control over land, government and education – on the other. The racial aspect that had been projected as the main social dividing line before independence gave way, to some extent, to the now clearly visible class aspect after independence. The cultural and social manifestations of these social divisions became obvious in the information and library field where the great divide between the "haves" and the "have-nots" became a cultural struggle for ideas and practices. This was also reflected in education with the struggle for relevant curricula as one of the battlefronts.

In the library field, the struggle was between those who took over the leadership role at senior levels at various key libraries such

as the University of Nairobi, Kenya National Library Service as well as in the professional body, the Kenya Library Association (now Kenya Library and Information Association) and staff at various levels in all the libraries.

The early processes of the progressive library moments in the UK and USA were different from those in Kenya. Under the parliamentary style of democracy in the former, the progressive movement took up a political stand which stood for the principles of justice and equality. Within this context, they opposed policies and practices that affected adversely the information rights of the people.

In contrast, the Kenyan progressive librarianship movement in the post-independence period developed under a neo-colonial regime which reinforced the inequality and injustice inherited from the former colonial power. All avenues of open, democratic and legal opposition to the monopoly power of the ruling political party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), and the ruling class were closed. The opposition party, Kenya People's Union (KPU), was banned in 1969; many progressive politicians were assassinated, for example Pio Gama Pinto, a prominent journalist, publisher and writer assassinated in 1965. Both these events signalled the end of any hope of a democratic resolution of the problems in Kenya. Political assassinations and massacres of entire communities continued, as documented in Umoja (1989), became the normal way of politics.

Under these circumstances, progressive political parties began to operate underground. Besides carrying on their political work, they had to confront from their underground strongholds the regime's total monopoly over mass media and means of communication. The regime controlled all social communications, including radio and TV which reached the largest number of people. While it did not totally control newspapers, it created a situation where the freedom of the press was severely curtailed, with severe punishment for publishing news and views deemed dangerous by the regime. Indeed, journalists and broadcasters, together with printers and booksellers, were among those specifically targeted by the regime. This put self-censorship high on the agenda.

The foundations of the progressive library movement in Kenya were laid in this political environment. It developed and grew within the underground political movement in the 1970s. It sought to meet

the political objectives of the underground movement to which it was aligned – the December Twelve Movement – which later emerged as Mwakenya and is known today as Mwakenya-DTM, preferring to remain outside the parliamentary system of “democracy”.¹⁴ The movement gave high priority to communicating its ideology and to its information collection and dissemination activities.

The Movement was active in producing and distributing its own publications which included books, pamphlets and newspapers, some for internal use of the movement itself and others for external use by its supporters and sympathisers. This was supplemented by a strong word-of-mouth campaign. Some of these publications are listed in Durrani (1997). The movement recognised from the earliest times the need to document its ideology and activities, initially for the development and awareness of its own cadres. This documentation later became an essential tool of recruiting and raising consciousness of those it identified as potential members and sympathisers. At the same time, lessons were learnt from the communication practices of the Mau Mau movement, some aspects of which are recorded in Durrani (1986):

After the declaration of Emergency by the Colonial authorities [in 1952], it became necessary for the Kenya Land and Freedom Army to go underground. But it functioned very efficiently as an organisation. This is shown, for example, in its communication activities. The colonial administration took over total control over all the mass media upon declaration of Emergency. Until then, the Kenya Land and Freedom Army had been publishing over fifty newspapers in Kiswahili and in various nationality languages, as well as a large number of struggle-songs and other anti-colonial material. The Emergency measures were now used to suppress all these publications which had functioned as important means of communication with the supporters of the KLFA.

The reorganised Kenya Land and Freedom Army soon found an alternative method of communicating not only with the

¹⁴ Mwakenya-DTM remains active to-date. For example, one of its recent publications, *Cheche Kenya: digital organ of Mwakenya-December Twelve Movement* was dated October 2012.

active fighters, but also with the masses who supported it and whose armed fist it was. Oral media were extensively used. Similarly, new printing presses and cyclostyling machines were installed at their Mathare Valley Headquarters to issue hand bills, posters and newspapers. They published the *High Command* which was issued regularly between 1952 and 1957. This was initially printed by Asian Kenyan cadres and supporters of Kenya Land and Freedom Army, as they could initially escape colonial suspicion.

Later, it was printed at the Mathare Valley printing works of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army. *High Command* was anti-imperialist in content. It circulated underground among the 35,000 freedom fighters. It provided a basic forum for the politicisation and advancement of the combatants. It informed them on the ideology, the organisation, the strategies, and activities of the revolution.

The December Twelve Movement studied and put into practice the lessons of how Mau Mau managed to communicate in the face of a very strict embargo in the communications field imposed by the colonial power. It used this experience to develop its own communications strategy to meet the new challenges posed by the neo-colonial. The stage was set for a fierce battle in the communications field.

The Library Cell

The Library Cell's underground activities

The Library Cell

The progressive librarianship activities examined in this book were developed and guided by a library group which remained hidden and existed only underground. It had no official presence in the country. Its very existence was not known outside the committed group of political and information activists who set it up as part of their political and information work. Yet it influenced the thinking and actions of many librarians working in different libraries in Kenya. It was based at the University of Nairobi Library from where its influence spread to

other libraries and librarians around the country. This was the Library Cell of the December Twelve Movement. Its significance can best be seen in the range and depth of its activities as it has never openly revealed details of its work, or even of its existence. Some activities of the Library Cell are examined below.

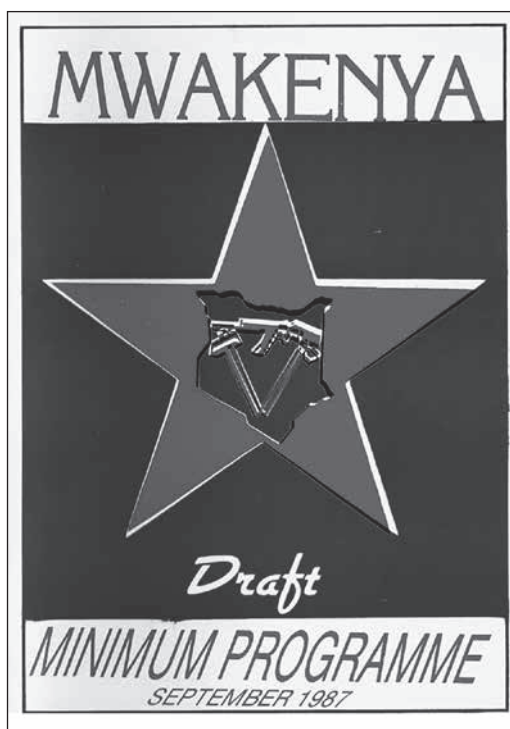
The Library Cell's activities need to be seen in the context of December Twelve Movement's (DTM) broader communications activity, which had several strands.

However, DTM used its publishing activity not only as means of communication, but also as a tool to build and develop its organisational structures. In this it was influenced by the publishing activities of various liberation movements, ranging from the early work of Marx and Engels, to the experience of the Chinese revolution and writings of Mao, among others.

While the DTM always recognised the significance of information as a key tool in its struggle, it was not until 1977 that a specific Library Cell was created. The Cell worked at two levels: underground and above ground. It moved from one to the other as and when conditions changed. At the underground level, its members linked up with workers and peasants in Nairobi as well as in the countryside, providing not only a network of cadres and membership, but also a regular source of information from the struggles of the people and provided the Movement's material such as poems for the *Tunakataa!* Collection mentioned below. In return, members shared its ideology and political programme with them through discussions with all those it came into contact with, often using the oral medium when the print or mass media were not appropriate.

The Library Cell was active in Kenya from its inception in 1977 and established a London centre in 1985 when some members had to flee the country due to political repression. After that date, the two centres worked closely and maintained links with each other through an underground network of "safe" communication system. Cell members maintained a low public profile because of the extreme sensitivity of its work, although they were active in many of its over-ground activities.

Mwakenya's minimum programme



9: Mwakenya's Draft Minimum Programme (1987)

Mwakenya and its predecessor, December Twelve Movement, were underground movements that challenged the neo-colonial regime of Kenya African National Union (KANU) in Kenya. While it is the activities of its Library Cell that we examine in this book, it would be useful to examine what Mwakenya-DTM stood for as this provides the political perspective on the work of the Library Cell. Mwakenya issued many policy documents, books and newspapers to clarify its position. Mwakenya (1987a) makes its stand clear:

Mwakenya is a democratic party of the workers, peasants, progressive intelligentsia and all other patriotic Kenyan fighting for the interests of the oppressed, exploited and humiliated majority of the people in all the nationalities of Kenya. Mwakenya is totally opposed to the ruling

neo-colonial regime in Kenya now reduced to a clique of corrupt, dictatorial, repressive and traitorous minority of wealthy thieves and robbers sheltering under the KANU flag. Instead of seriously addressing its energies to solving the deteriorating living conditions of the people, the ruling puppet regime has actually sold our sovereignty to foreign imperialist masters for a few dollars.

This provides a glimpse into the stand of the underground movement which formed the basis for the activities of the Library Cell. Having developed as part of the political movement, the Library Cell was political in outlook, seeking to achieve the democratic vision of a socialist state in Kenya. However, at the library professional level, the Cell sought to develop ideas and practices in librarianship more in keeping with the information-related needs of the people of Kenya. In this it opposed the conservative library status quo created with the blessing of the former colonial power. Hence there was no talk in its programme of neutrality or of meeting the information wants of the rich minority of people or pretence of being outside politics. It stood unashamedly for providing an alternative, progressive information services to working people in Kenya. It was internationalist in outlook, learning from experiences not only of Kenyans but from those of people in other countries struggling for liberation.

Publishing: an annotated bibliography and study guide

PUBLISHING, A STUDY GUIDE

1. LENIN'S FIGHT AGAINST "ECONOMISM". APPEARANCE OF LENIN'S NEWSPAPER "ISKRA"
CPSU(B) Chapter 1 Sec.5 (p.23-)

The fight for the creation of an independent political party of the proletariat was chiefly waged by "Iskra", the illegal newspaper founded by Lenin. Lenin conceived the idea of founding a big illegal Marxist newspaper on an all-Russian scale. The numerous small Marxist circles which already existed were not yet linked up. Only such a newspaper could link up the disunited Marxist organizations and prepare the way for the creation of a real party. Lenin decided to publish the newspaper abroad. There it was printed on very thin but durable paper and secretly smuggled into Russia. Some of the issues of "Iskra" were reprinted in Russia by secret printing plants.

Everywhere he made arrangements with the comrades about codes for secret correspondence, addresses to which literature could be sent. The first issue of "Iskra" appeared abroad in 1900. The title page bore the epigraph "The Spark Will Kindle a Flame."

2. "Iskra's" Fight For Lenin's Plan.
CPSU(B) 2(2)30-

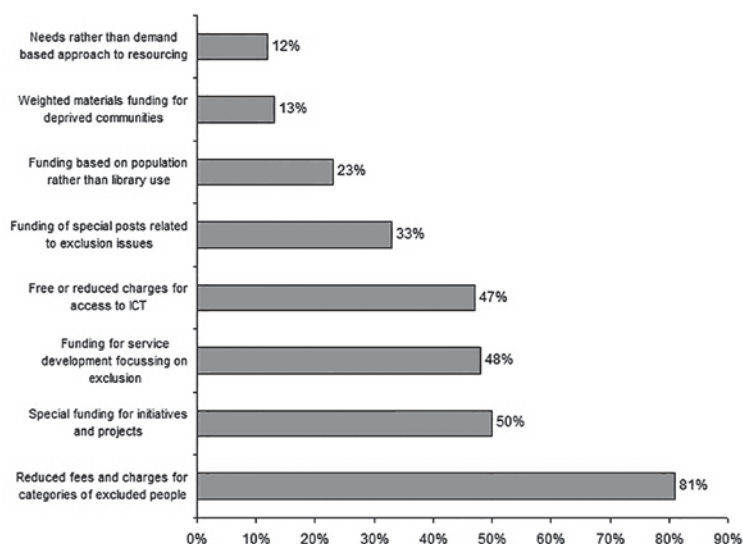
"Before we can unite, and in order that we may unite, we must first of all draw firm and definite lines of demarcation." (Lenin, *Selected Works*, Eng. ed., Vol. II, p. 45.)

Lenin accordingly held that the building of a political party of the working class should be begun by the founding of a militant political newspaper on an all-Russian scale, which would carry on propaganda and agitation in favour of the views of revolutionary Social-Democracy—that the establishment of such a newspaper should be the first step in the building of the Party.

In his well-known article, "Where to Begin?" Lenin outlined a concrete plan for the building of the Party, a plan which was later expanded in his famous work *What Is To Be Done?*

"In our opinion," wrote Lenin in this article, "the starting point of our activities, the first practical step towards creating the organization desired," finally, the main thread following which we would be able to develop, deepen and expand that organization unswervingly, should be the establishment of a political newspaper on an all-Russian scale. . . . Without it we cannot systematically carry on that all-embracing propaganda and agitation, consistent in principle, which form the chief and constant task of Social-Democrats in general, and the particularly urgent task of the present moment when

* That is, the formation of a party.—*Ed.*



11: "Open to All?" policy & strategy (PLA: Public Library Authorities)

The Library Cell's library work included preparation of annotated study guides and bibliographies for use by DTM membership. Among its early documentation work was *Publishing: an annotated bibliography and study guide* (Durrani, 1979a). This represented the political aspect of information and library work of the Library Cell. Such activities perhaps points to the role of a progressive librarianship in supporting people's struggle for liberation.

It should be noted that at the time the bibliography was produced, it was very difficult in Kenya to acquire Marxist and liberation literature either historical or from contemporary liberation struggles. The Kenyan Special Branch police officers checked at the University Library, among other places, to see who borrowed Marxist material; other officials were posted outside progressive bookshops to keep an eye on those who bought such material. Needless to say, the Chinese Embassy gates were also under Special Branch surveillance.

An interesting feature of this bibliography was that it provided selected extracts to the quoted texts. Such extracts were invaluable to DTM cadres who did not always have access to the original articles, although the originals could be requested from the DTM library network. They got the key content of these documents through such

study guides and annotated bibliographies. In this particular case, the message was to learn from theories guiding other liberation struggles and to understand the critical role that information activities play in revolutionary practice.

Such activities took place in the days before easy internet access and also in a period when acquiring liberation material was extremely difficult and dangerous. Through its underground network and the Library Cell, DTM had built up a substantial underground library of Marxist and liberation literature which the compilers used to produce study guides and to annotate the bibliography. The experiences from other liberation movements, in Africa as well as in Asia and Latin America, provided useful lessons for the Kenyan struggle.

Another problem that progressive librarianship movement in Kenya overcame was that of lack of printing facilities which were under Government surveillance and no progressive material could be printed openly. Thus they resorted to photocopying documents such as the Bibliography, as well as chapters from progressive readings which formed the basis of study sessions at cell levels. The resources of various organisations where cadres worked were used to duplicate and photocopy material without the authorities becoming aware of it. Similarly, the underground newspapers and books were reproduced by using “safe” typewriters, duplicating machines and other printing methods in places made safe by DTM activists.

The section below looks at some ideas and practice from other liberation struggles as highlighted in the Bibliography, not only to better understand the background of the information sector in the liberation movement in Kenya, but also because they provide valuable lessons on the role that progressive librarians can play in situations of rapid social change and struggles for liberation.

The document, *Publishing, a bibliography and study guide* is in two parts. The first part is entitled “*Publishing, an annotated bibliography*” and runs to eight typed pages. It lists 45 annotated references. The first one is a reference to Engel’s article “Marx and the *New Rhenish Gazette*, 1848-1849” taken from Marx and Engels’s *Selected Works*.¹⁵ The compiler explains: “the article examines historically

¹⁵ Marx and Engels’s *Selected Works in Three Volumes* (1970, Moscow. Progress Publishers, Vol. 3 pp. 164-172).

the development of the press in Russia. It traces various stages, e.g. leaflets, illegal working class newspapers, and working class press. It also examines the two trends in the working class press – the Marxist and the opportunistic. The article is particularly significant as the experiences in Kenya are similar”.

The Bibliography carries articles on press, publishing and organised political work by Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. It refers readers to relevant articles in *Iskra* and *Prauda* in the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik)*, a document widely available to DTM cadres. The compiler highlights Lenin's words: “the history of the workers' press in Russia is indissolubly linked up with the history of the democratic and socialist movement”. It is noteworthy that collected works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao were all available in the underground library set up by DTM and cadres had access to it via their cell structures.

The Bibliography contains several quotes from Stalin, among them the following two which were particularly relevant to the situation in Kenya and which helped to guide DTM activists in their political work:

The press establishes an imperceptible link between the Party and the working class, a link which is as strong as any mass transmission apparatus ... the press is a most powerful weapon by means of which the Party daily, hourly, speaks to the working class.¹⁶

And

The importance of workers' participation in the conduct of a newspaper lies primarily in the fact that such participation makes it possible to transform this sharp weapon in the class struggle, as a newspaper is, from a weapon for the enslavement of the people into a weapon for their emancipation. Only worker and peasant *correspondents* can bring about this great transformation.¹⁷

¹⁶ Stalin, J. The Press as a collective organiser. *Works*. 1947, Moscow. Vol. 5. pp. 286-90).

¹⁷ (Stalin, J.: The worker correspondents. *Works*. 1947. Vol. 6. pp. 274-75).

The Bibliography includes a reference from the *History of the Party of Labour of Albania* as well as several references to work of Mao, including his following quote: “before you make a revolution, you must first create public opinion”.¹⁸

The second part of the Bibliography is entitled *Publishing, a study guide* which runs to 21 pages with 15 references, but with larger extracts from the original articles. The first nine references are from Lenin’s writing on the history of the workers’ press in Russia, including on the first political Marxist newspaper, *Iskra* and the Bolshevik daily newspaper, *Pravda*. Two references are from the History of the Party of Labour of Albania, one on the Communist-led press, the other on *Zeri I Populli*, the Organ of the Communist Party of Albania.¹⁹ The remaining references are from Mao’s Introduction to *The Communist*, (“Oppose stereotyped party writing”), a talk to the Editorial staff of the *Shansi-Suiyuan Daily* and his “Introducing the *Chinese Worker*”.

The lessons from the literature referenced in the Bibliography were well learnt by the members of the Library Cell as well as by the underground movement as a whole. But perhaps more important in the context of this book, there were lessons on what the role of a progressive librarian should be in supporting a liberation struggle. In the Kenyan context, this involved initially establishing the information needs of users. Having done this, ways had to be found to meet these needs. One such need was satisfied by studying relevant historical and other documents, compiling bibliographies for use by the targeted users, and then by providing easy access to ideas and experiences not readily available to them in the original, print form. In order to do this, the Library Cell did not follow the example of the public library service and provide access to colonial-type material, but focused on revolutionary material which had direct relevance to the on-going struggle. For them, the professional *was* the political and there were no artificial barriers between these two aspects.

¹⁸ Talk at the meeting of the Central Cultural Revolutionary Group, 9 January, 1967. Quoted from Schram, Stuart R., Editor: *Mao Tse-Tung Unrehearsed*”).

¹⁹ Party of Labour of Albania (1971, Tirana),

Underground publications

Another way in which the Library Cell met the needs of the people was writing, printing and distributing underground pamphlets. Thus a number of underground pamphlets were cyclostyled by Cell members using a secret basement in a house in the Parklands area of Nairobi. The house itself had been a “safe” underground facility for a number of political activities, including a venue for safe meetings. It also housed the Movement’s library which served as a central reference centre for the movement. The “Notes accompanying donation of books to Cuba” (Durrani, 2008) in 2000, provides further details on the library:

Thus the liberation forces of necessity had to set up their own underground liberation libraries. Perhaps the largest one was the one run by Nazmi Durrani, which provided a major reference point for December Twelve movement which published its own newspaper *Pambana* (“Struggle”) in early 1980s. The library contained material which was banned in Kenya and which could lead to indefinite detention if found out. This included works of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Castro, as well as publications from USSR and the Foreign Language Press in Beijing. This library also provided the source material for important document in the fight against the neo-colonial Moi regime such as Mwakenya’s *Kenya, Register of Resistance* (1987), and Umoja-Kenya’s 1989 publication, *Moi’s reign of terror: a decade of nyayo crimes against the people of Kenya*. The safe house also became a centre of cyclostyling²⁰ and distribution for the second issue of *Pambana* published in July 1983. Cell members used motorbikes, cars, bicycles and public transport to distribute the newspapers to other cadres as well as to members of public from the house.

²⁰ “Cyclostyle (copier): The cyclostyle duplicating process is a form of stencil copying invented by David Gestetner in London in 1890. A stencil is cut with the help of small toothed wheels on a special paper underlaid with carbon paper which serves as a printing form. Gestetner named the Cyclostyle after a drawing tool he used. In 1875 Thomas Edison received a patent for the “electric pen”, which a decade later became the basis for the mimeograph machine. Gestetner’s cyclostyle was similar and provided more automated, faster reproductions. See stencil duplicator”. From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia. Available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyclostyle_\(copier\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyclostyle_(copier)) [Accessed: 18-10-12].

The Library Cell members wrote and compiled several articles in the Movement's publications. One such, included in the second issue of *Pambana*, was entitled "The politics of food" and was written by a Library Cell member. It used the resources of the University of Nairobi library to get facts on farming in China, Cuba, Nicaragua and North Korea. The selection of these countries, together with the last part of the item, "Lessons for Kenya", reflect an important contribution that the Library Cell made not only in the information and library field, but in general politics of Kenya. It also pointed to the role of progressive librarians in the struggle for national liberation.

A number of observations can be made from the above. First, it was believed that it is a key role of librarians to use library resources to create awareness of the complexity of the problems facing the society. There was not an assumption that libraries were "open to all" just by being there and that information would automatically reach peasants and workers and activists who needed this information. At the same time, it was considered the role of librarians to find examples from around the world to see what solutions other people found to similar problems. More important perhaps, the Library Cell showed that they considered it their role to be politically active in a situation where the society was divided along sharp class lines and where there was an active class struggle going on. The power and resources commanded by the ruling classes sought to deprive people of information and experiences relevant to their daily struggles, but the library activists sought to break this embargo using legal and illegal means. In this, the Library Cell's analysis and activities on the battle of ideas between classes in society met the approach and understanding of the South African Communist Party today:

The battle of ideas is an integral part of the class struggle. It is both a struggle over ideas themselves and a struggle for the progressive transformation of the major institutional means of ideological production and dissemination - including the media, the educational and training system, the policy apparatus within the state, and a wide range of cultural and faith-based institutions and practices.

Ultimately, different ideologies represent different class interests, but the connection between an ideology and a particular class, or fraction of a class, is not always one-to-one, or even easily recognizable. In any concrete situation particular ideologies are also often hybrid, a mixture of different ideological currents, and therefore there is not always a simple mechanical association between an ideology and a specific class. Moreover, the ruling ideas of the ruling class will tend to infiltrate the outlooks and beliefs of other classes and strata. This is particularly the case in our own current global and national realities, dominated by monopoly capital, including highly globalized media empires. In these conditions, the ideas of the global ruling class are repeated so often they begin to seem obvious, self-evident truths.

One of the key vanguard roles of our Communist Party is, precisely, to engage actively on this terrain, and to expose the class interests that lie behind what often seems like the natural way of things. (Umsebenzi online, 2012).

The Library Cell played an important role in increasing awareness about the existence of classes and class struggles in the society. Whereas the ruling classes, with the backing of Western finance capital, were keen to create social tension and divisions along tribal or racial lines as way of “dividing and ruling” people, the progressive library movement made it clear that the social reality in Kenya was that of classes, class divisions and class struggle where members of working classes from different nationalities shared a common interest in their struggle against dominating classes from all the nationalities. It also sought to challenge the negative terminology propagated by colonialism and their successors, for example, using the term “nationality” instead of the pejorative term, “tribes”, to describe people of Kenya. This was part of their attempts to liberate peoples’ minds, to give them pride in their culture and expand their horizons from the narrow confines created by those in power. Similarly, it encouraged the use of Kenyan nationality languages rather than being confined to the use of English. The newspaper articles and plays it was involved in were written in Kiswahili, Gikuyu and Gujarati as well as in English.

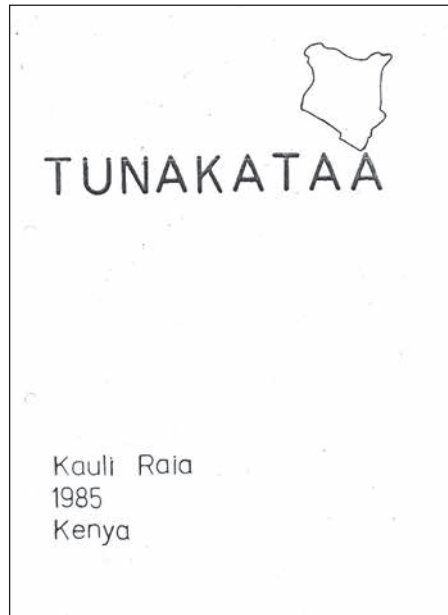
The Library Cell saw teaching people and activists as important aspect of its library work; it also saw learning from them as equally important. It considered free debates and free access to such debates as important rights of people. This was evident both in the range of publications it set up and in the content of such publications. One such publication aimed at activists was *Mpatanishi: internal organ of Mwakenya*. It was started to increase social and political awareness of Mwakenya members and cadres who would then take their new awareness to people. Its issue for Vol. 5 No. 3 December 1995 (pp. 25-34) carried an article entitled, "The Question of Nationalities in Kenya: a force for unity, not division" by Juma Abbas.²¹ It was published in a series entitled "Questions of our times". An editorial note explains the reasons for the publication of this article:

The following article by Juma Abbas is part of our internal debate on the questions of nationalities. It does not reflect the official policy of Mwakenya and is reproduced here to encourage greater debate and study on the question of nationalities. Readers are welcome to write articles giving other views or criticising the points made in this article. It is only in the context of such a debate that a proper understanding can result. Only then will we be able to produce appropriate policies and practices.

Another article by the same author was entitled "Capitalism and socialism: has the contradiction been resolved?" This was "written for UKenya [and] later published in *Mpatanishi*."²² Other underground publications are recorded in Durrani (1997) and the Library Cell was involved in producing many of these publications as well as in writing articles for them.

²¹ This was one of the pseudonyms used by Shiraz Durrani.

²² Vol. 2 (1) 11-12, Sept. 1992.

Tunakataa! – We say no!**12: Tunakataa (We say no) resistance poems**

Yet another activity of the Library Cell was collection, and in many cases, writing resistance poetry under the title *Tunakataa!* (*We say no!* in Kiswahili). This consists of a large number of poems in Kiswahili written by workers and activists as they reflect on the daily acts of repression and resistance during the 1980s. While the collection has not yet been published, it is scheduled to be published by Vita Books whose earlier publicity explains the scope of the collection:

In history, people reach a stage when they say “No” to oppression and exploitation. During the colonial phase in Kenya, Mau Mau developed appropriate methods of saying “No” to colonial exploitation. It developed songs, dance and other cultural activities that clearly embodied the message of people’s struggle.

Once again, under neo-colonialism the same tradition of resistance is emerging. *Tunakataa!* is a collection of poetry

written by Kenyans who remain anonymous. These poems in reality reflect the everyday reality of the lives of Kenyan people today. They clearly reflect the sufferings, the hopes, and the strength of the working class in Kenya today.

Here for the first time is shown the demands of workers and peasants. The poems show their total awareness of the forces in society that have moulded our lives. They also reveal international awareness that their own particular struggles and those of South Africa, Palestine, and Nicaragua are different regional aspects of the same struggle.

Here is the voice of the people saying "No" to imperialism in its last but most vicious stage of neo-colonialism. In that sense *Tunakataa!* is the voice of all people in the world struggling against imperialist exploitation.

Reproduced below is one of the poems, *Muoroto*, written on 28 May, 1990:

Tunakataa!: *Muoroto*

Tunakataa! Muoroto (poem)

On a cold May morning
They came with their
Rungus and tear gas
Followed by bulldozers
on a mission of terror
and destruction
to raze to ground
what little the poor own
to make room for
The supermarket owned
By those with plenty.

Kiosks and houses
of mabati and cardboard
they certainly did flatten.
Property of petty traders
and slum dwellers

they certainly reduced to dust.
 But the 2,000 of Muoroto
 men and women
 children and wazee
 they failed to terrorise.
 The cowardly brutality of the terrorists
 was met with fearless resistance.
 The battle raged
 for seven long hours
 stones and sticks
 held at bay
 rungas and guns.

In the end
 the organised oppression
 subdued, silenced
 the improvised opposition.

But is that
 really the end?
 Will today's winner
 always win?
 What about tomorrow
 when today's
 spontaneous opposition
 gives way to
 organised resistance?

Tunakataa! provides an authentic voice of resistance from Kenya. It addresses the language issue as the original poems were written in Kiswahili – reflecting the background of their working class authors, but these have been translated into English to make them more widely available. The collection and writing of these resistance poems was another aspect of the work of the Library Cell. This is yet another way in which the progressive librarianship movement differs from the conservative one which does not see such activism as part of its remit as librarians.

Recording resistance

The Library Cell operated at two levels in keeping with the conditions outlined earlier. One of its underground activities was the setting up of a library stocked with progressive and Marxist material which were banned or available from a limited “open” source. It also included key documents from Kenyan history, including the entire colonial period, particularly the Mau Mau war of liberation. It also started a project to archive Mau Mau liberation material by interviewing veterans. In addition, the Cell was active in producing reading guides, in duplicating the Movement’s pamphlets, hand-outs and other documents and was also responsible for duplicating and distributing the second issue of its underground newspaper *Pambana*. It collected information about resistance activities of workers, peasants, students and progressive professionals, not only in Kenya but from other struggles around the world. It had a sizable collection from China, North Korea, Cuba and other Latin American struggles, besides various African struggles such as Mozambique and Guinea Bissau and South Africa. It provided facilities for research into subjects for which the Movement needed background information and statistics on which to base policies and programmes. At this level, the Library Cell helped to guide and clarify the ideological standing of the Movement and provided recommended learning material for leaders and general members. Its resources included duplicating machines, safe photocopying facilities, “safe” typewriters, mailing and distribution networks and safe places for duplicating and distribution work. It had resources to communicate in various Kenyan languages such as Gikuyu, as well as the minority Gujarati language.

The work of the Library Cell included the production of a number of regular information updates on the political situation in the country, as well as documenting resistance. The scope of such publications is political and so remains outside the scope of this book. However a few of such publications can be mentioned here.

Upande Mwingine (“The Other Side”): Mwakenya (1987b) describes this as follows:

“... the very brilliant, meticulous monthly and annual documentation of the resistance actions of workers, peasants, and students etc. in industry, commerce, plantations, schools and

colleges, carried out by *Upande Mwingine*, the underground workers' organ. *Upande Mwingine* has systematically compiled this Kiswahili register of strikes and demonstrations by the working people over a number of years."

Article 5: It was prepared for use of the underground DTM. It was a sister publication of *Upande Mwingine*, *Article 5* it kept a record of incidents of deaths, beatings, jailings, mass punishments carried on by the regime, as opposed to resistance which was recorded by *Upande Mwingine*. The title, *Article 5* refers to Article 5 of the Declaration of Human Rights, on the freedom of information.

While the Library Cell was active in all political activities of DTM, its particular remit was information and library-related.

The Cell's work at the University of Nairobi was to provide progressive ideas on politics and librarianship to library staff, not only from the University of Nairobi libraries, but other libraries as well. It was active in the setting up of the proposed progressive Kenya Agriculture and Veterinary Library Association. It also linked up with progressive students and their leaders and organisations at the University. At the library level, it aimed to develop thought and practice on progressive librarianship. In this, it often challenged the stand and practice of librarianship taken by the Kenya Library Association and the University of Nairobi Library Service. It challenged the focus on a narrow concept of "professionalism" among librarians. It gave a voice and an opportunity to middle and lower-level staff in libraries - including cleaners and Library Attendants who provided basic support administrative service. It provided alternative, progressive ideas to them and organised workshops and other activities where they could meet their peers and discuss issues not usually on the agenda in the Library system or in the profession. Thus was created the first generation of progressive librarians, although the term itself was not used.

At the student level, the Cell provided technical assistance for student publications and provided articles on the history of working class in Kenya - something that was not so easily available. As the student leadership said, new generations are going through University education without any awareness of peoples' struggles for liberation

around the world or in Kenya. Among articles written for the students were the ones on prominent progressive Kenyans such as Pio Gama Pinto, Kimaathi and Makhan Singh; others were on historical topics such as “Maji Maji war against German colonialism in Tanzania”. The last was linked up with the play “Kinjikitile – maji maji” which was another drama project of the Library Cell. At a later stage when students started getting arrested and put in prison in Kenya, the Cell secretly collected information on their numbers, prison conditions and other details not usually available in the media for distribution within and outside the country.

The above facts and analyses were all prepared by the Library Cell and showed the intensity of class struggle in Kenya at the time. It also pointed to a new role of librarians that was needed not only to dig out hard facts, but also to analyse and create a new, realistic picture of a reality obscured by the official mass media and Government dominated press. They thus provided an “information weapon” to make people aware of the extent of resistance and the unpopularity of the regime and its backers. Resistance in Kenya was greatly influenced by a social reality in which a few “leaders” became multi-millionaires almost overnight while the majority of people lost their right to land, education and indeed any means of livelihood. Social reality recounted by Moore (2012) provides the economic and political background against which the Library Cell prepared its documentation work:

Mr Kenyatta inherited some 500,000 acres of real estate that his father, Kenya’s founding president, acquired at low prices through a settlement with the British. Mr Kenyatta, who also owns significant stakes in Kenyan media, banking and agriculture, is worth is about \$500 million, Forbes has estimated.

Thus the information-gathering and dissemination activities of DTM and its Library Cell aimed to make people aware of the causes of their impoverishment.

Another example of recording resistance activity of the Library Cell was a 12-page detailed report prepared by Naila Durrani, a Library Cell member on July 30th, 1985. The report was circulated to the international community, including Amnesty International in London. This documented the arrest, detention and torture of fourteen University of Nairobi students. They were arrested on returning from a trip to meet students of the Kenyatta University College. The report provided detailed accounts of torture such as the notorious "swimming pool":

"... a cell with water knee high. The victim was stripped naked and pushed into the water cell. No food was given to the victim and since he could not go out, the swimming pool also served as the toilet".

M.M. (a student leader whose name was mentioned in the Report) stayed in the swimming pool for seven days, then again for four days, without food or any other relief.

The students were sentenced to six month's imprisonment each and taken to a prison in Kirinyaga District. Meanwhile, beating of the prisoners was the order of the day: "One common beating was a thrashing on the back on the spinal cord ... another was beating with a stick the bones of knuckles, knees and elbows". The Report documents a "particular case of a convicted teacher who died a horrific death":

When the teacher became violent as a result of untended malaria, he was handcuffed and put in his own cell, naked. The prison warders claimed, as usual, that he was "malingering". He was handcuffed, both in wrists and legs. As he struggled to free himself, he cut his hands and legs. He would bang his head and body against the cell door and thus ended up with cuts and wounds which soon got contaminated. His whole body became one sore wound. He could not walk, sit, sleep or eat or do anything else. The prison doctor, who was no different to the warders, referred him to Kerugoya Hospital. After two days, the students heard the terrible news that the teacher had died of blood poisoning.

The report then goes on to record an outbreak of cholera in the prison when no treatment was given and many prisoners died. The point about this Report is not only that it brought the horror of torture that was the daily fare of people in Kenya, but also the need for this information to be circulated to Governments and human rights organisations both inside and outside the country. The Report was written within months of the arrest and imprisonment of the students. Their descriptions of their own and other prisoners' treatment had to reach those outside the prison as soon as possible, as many lives were at risk. Yet conducting interviews and writing reports was no easy matter and involved much personal risk. It is to the credit of the Library Cell and its members that such researching, recording and distribution work was carried out even when facing the same prison conditions as the students. Further, it is a testament to the strength to the strong organisation that the Library Cell was. In the process, it defines a new role for librarians in situations of grave danger. One hears daily reports of journalists facing life threatening situations all over the world. Librarians, if they are to perform their professional duty appropriately, would face similar dangers. But while journalists do not create "safe jobs" for themselves when they continue to face danger and death in order to carry on their professional duties, the same cannot be said for the conservative library professionals. The progressive library activists in Kenya set a new standard of library work in carrying out such information work.

Form and content

An important point to note about the activities of the Library Cell was the importance it attached to both the form and the content of its communication activities. The message it gave to people responded to the material needs of working people for such information. The needs were ascertained and reinforced through its practical political work – investigating communities and practice of the DTM activists. The needs were then satisfied in an appropriate form and in an appropriate language that could ensure that the information was accessible to those it was aimed at. Thus oral medium was combined with the print medium. At other times, the Library Cell members armed Mau Mau veterans with tape recorders and cameras to document their history

– and in the process became information activists. At the same time, they ensured that there was not mere transmission of one-way information, but a two-way communication process using the political networks. These lessons were later adopted into library work during the discussion at the library workshops organised by the Library Cell at the University of Nairobi in the early 1980s.

An indication of the approach used by the Library Cell in meeting the information needs of a political movement was given by the author in a question posed by *BiS* 2006.²³ The answer to the question, “In a popular movement, what is the role of the professional librarian or information worker?” provides an approach used by progressive librarians in Kenya:

It is important to see professional librarians in their social context. They are part of a social setup which, under capitalism, is divided into various classes. The information sector, in common with other aspects of life, is in effect a tool of a particular class which uses it to further its class interests. At the same time, classes with less political or economic power are engaged in a constant resistance to assert *their* class interests. The professionals in this context are not neutral. Whether they admit it or not, they are involved in this struggle on one side or another.

A popular movement in such a situation seeks political power to meet the needs of those it represents. A key requirement for their struggle to succeed is control over social information. The information needs of the popular movement are, of course, related to the needs of their struggles. In essence, they need to know everything their enemies know, but in addition they also need to know and understand the reality of the situation from their own point of view, both national and international, so that they draw correct lessons for their struggles. They need scientific and technological information which can further their social struggles as well as provide means of satisfying their

²³ See: *BiS* No. 3 (2007). Available at: <http://foreningenbis.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/bis603.pdf>. [Accessed: 12-03-12]. The interview is reproduced in Durrani (2008) pp. 226-229.

material needs. For this to be done, they need to control tools of social communication – printing presses, books, radio stations, ICT, videos, photo documentation, libraries and all the other tools made possible by developments in ICT.

Thus a popular movement needs its activists to have skills to ensure that it can control and use all these technologies – just as they need the skills of lawyers, doctors, peasants and workers.

Professional librarians can contribute to the success of a popular movement by being active in the struggle and contributing their skills to provide informational support for the popular struggle. All the traditional skills of the information professional – acquiring material relevant to advance their struggle, storing, dissemination, cataloguing and classifying information etc. – are needed in the struggle. Librarians are the collective information banks of the struggle upon which the organisation can draw.

No popular liberation movement can succeed in achieving its vision without ensuring that its information needs are met. Thus the Mau Mau had a comprehensive information strategy to meet its information and communications needs, as documented in *Never be Silent*. They controlled newspapers, printing presses, teaching programmes; they organised field hospitals and gun factories, they established libraries in secret locations – all of which needed appropriate skills and information. They developed methods of information dissemination and used orature and freedom songs to reach people who could not read or write. They also collected and used intelligence to monitor enemy movement, and battle strength. In all this, the trade union movement played a key role.

The Mau Mau did not have professional librarians as we know them today to do this work. But the need for the librarian's skills was there. In fact it was the activists themselves

who became librarians and documented events, wrote and collected information, organised secret libraries in the forests and ensured that correct information reached those who needed it in an appropriate form and at the right time. Today's "professional" librarians can learn much from their example of how to be activist librarians.

Given the stranglehold over mass media globally by a small number of media conglomerates, it is important that alternative information is made available to people in a form and language appropriate to local needs.

At the same time, a popular movement needs to work with other popular movements to strengthen itself. Imperialist forces work globally, forming "coalitions of the willing" to maintain their stranglehold over people, countries and resources. In the same way, popular forces need to work in unity in a global alliance with those struggling against imperialism. Information activists need to take a leadership role in this process of global co-operation of popular forces and facilitate information transfer to bring people and organisations together on the basis of awareness about each other's programmes, visions, experiences, successes and failures.

The vision of a global popular movement, such as the World Social Movement, can emerge only if there is this active information exchange. It is the role of the professional librarian to create networks for such exchanges.

The above examples provide some areas in which the Library Cell was active in its underground information activities. The next section examines some of its above-ground activities – the two aspects providing a more complete picture of the information work of a pioneering movement.

The Library Cell's over ground work

While the underground press of DTM was used by the Library Cell to disseminate information and create wider awareness of issues facing the society, it did not ignore the open, democratic, public spaces that were still available in the restrictive environment. New democratic avenues were opened up as old ones were closed by government action. Drama was one such avenue, the running of Library Workshops another, and the setting up of journals and magazines yet another. Many articles were written for workshops whose proceedings and discussions were published in journals and press. Some were published in international journals to gain wider exposure and legitimacy for the views expressed.

At the open, democratic level, the Library Cell involved itself in writing and publishing books and journals and also in producing plays with relevant themes. It soon began to influence a large number of library workers across the capital and soon began to expand to other towns. Wider support among librarians and academicians for the work of the Library Cell is indicated by the large number of library workers who sought to make the Kenya Library Association move towards a progressive position, by the large number of people who attended its workshops from all across the City and by the large mailing list of the *University of Nairobi Library Magazine*.

The DTM activists were involved in a number of over ground activities which provided occasions for politicising and recruiting new members and also to make people aware of an anti-imperialist interpretation of history and current affairs. Such activities included the production of plays such as *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, ("I Will Marry When I Want") by Ngugi wa Thiong'o performed in Kenya in 1977 at Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre. At the same time, DTM activists at the University of Nairobi were active in trade union activities and liaised closely with the student body, Student Organisation of University of Nairobi (SONU). A Library Cell member was an advisor for a time for their news magazine, *Sauti ya Kamukunji* ["Voice of Kamukunji"]²⁴, which also published a number of articles written by Library Cell members.

²⁴ Refers to the Kamukunji grounds in Nairobi, the venue for mass meetings during the struggle for multi-party politics in the 1990's. "Voice of Kamukunji" came to symbolise the voice of people struggling for liberation and democracy.

While the underground provided the Library Cell with the environment in which to undertake political information work that was not the only area in which it was active. In keeping with the DTM's view that working with the people was an important aspect of its political work, the Library Cell created a network of activities for creating wider awareness about social reality. These also provided opportunities for library workers, whether members of the Cell or not, opportunities to practice progressive librarianship and also be active in the struggle. In the process, new ideas and theories in information as well as in political work were generated. Some of these above ground activities are recorded below.

People have the right

The progressive librarians organised an exhibition and discussion on the theme of "People have the right to food they need: the causes of hunger and proposed solution in Kenya". This was organised at Kabete Library in conjunction with the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) Kenya office to coincide with the World Food Day (16 October, 1981). This was part of an activist agenda that to this day distinguishes the progressive librarianship movement. The event was held over two days, the first one included presentations by FAO, Kenya Agricultural Information Centre, the Ministry of Agriculture Library and the Kenya Agricultural Documentation Centre, Jomo Kenyatta College of Agriculture and Technology library and a presentation from and a tour of the Kabete (Agriculture and Veterinary) Library of the university of Nairobi. The second day involved discussions on three topics:

1. Organisation of agricultural information in Kenya for maximum dissemination to those who need it and in appropriate forms and languages
2. People have the right to the food they need: causes of hunger and proposed solutions in Kenya
3. The proposed Association of Agricultural Information Workers in Kenya.

In total, 125 participants attend the event.²⁵ It should be noted that the theme of the exhibition as well as discussions moved into the highly dangerous political field, as there was a famine in parts of Kenya even as those in position of power were exporting much-needed food using state corporations. Branch (2011) sets the scene on the agricultural front:

A combination of mismanagement and official corruption led to shortages of food and other essential items in the shops. Given control of state-owned interests, individuals close to the president were free to cannibalise those operations as reward for their loyalty. Basic staples were being smuggled across Kenya's borders for higher prices outside the country, while Kenyans went without. That smugglers were also reselling humanitarian food aid back to the international market only made matters worse.

Again, the political climate in the country was highly charged with major crackdowns by the government on progressive activists in all fields. But the root of problems facing Kenya was the corporate control over agriculture and crackdowns on resistance may hide the problem from the media, but can do nothing to resolve the problem. Mwakenya (1987) explains:

At independence in 1963, the KANU regime opted for capitalism. But it was not an independent capitalism. It was, and still is, an extension of Western imperialism. That means that our economy is foreign owned. The main banking and other financial institutions are owned by Western monopolies. So are our industry and commerce. The symbol of this domination is IMF and the World Bank. These two dictate Kenya's economic and social policies. Today the KANU regime merely supervises the domination of our economy, politics and culture by U.S.-led imperialism. Every year more wealth flows out of the country than comes in. (p.5).

The other side of this picture is the resistance of people, which remains to be fully documented. Recording resistance was an important aspect

²⁵ *IAALD Quarterly Bulletin*, XXVI, 4, 1981 pp. 144-45.

of progressive librarianship work in Kenya. The voice of librarians, as represented in *Sauti ya Wakutubi*, and their manifestations in drama, art and creative works, should be seen in the context of the national resistance of Kenyan people against the dictatorial rule of KANU and its Western finance backers. They helped to give voice to their resistance even as it helped to clarify the contradictions inherent in the society at the time. This is, in the final analysis, the contribution that progressive librarianship can make in being active in social struggles.

Alakmalak

The Library Cell took a number of initiatives to ensure their creative output reflecting a socialist world outlook reached the public. A key concern for the Library Cell was the content of communication. In an environment where the publishing industry was dominated by multinational corporations, it was almost impossible for progressive voice to be published. While there were some publishers who were interested in creating avenues for progressive voices to be heard, there were legal, and perhaps more important, political obstacles to this. In this situation, the voice of resistance used the tactics advanced by the Mau Mau liberation movement in the 1940s and 50s. Some aspects of these earlier, pre-independence experiences are documented in Durrani (2006). In the post-independence period, the progressive political voice went underground. Some aspects of the former were again considered in Durrani (1997).

The Library Cell, while being actively involved in the underground political communications activities, also used whatever open publishing opportunities were available. In addition, members were keen to communicate in the different Kenyan languages. While open apartheid-type racism came to an end at the time of independence in 1963, the ruling elite used the same divide-and-rule tactics of colonialism to keep people busy with lesser battles so as to keep its grab of land, the economy and political power out of public attention. One such tactic was to stir hostilities between people on the basis of nationalities, or “tribes” as they were called. There was also an increase in inter-racial tensions. Anti-South Asian feelings were whipped up from time to time to hide the real damage to working people being done by transnational corporations with the active support of the

ruling classes. In response to this situation, Library Cell members used their own particular languages to reach out to their own communities with a message of hope that also sought to bring the real history of resistance and achievements to the attention of all. Thus, at one level, DTM used the Gikuyu play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*²⁶, to bring the reality of imperialism and people's resistance to light – while using it to politicise and to “activate” people to join the struggle for a second liberation.

Library Cell members were active in other areas as well. One method they used was the use of open publishing avenues to create a new awareness of the history of resistance. An important contribution was that of Nazmi Durrani writing as Nazmi Ramji for security reasons. He worked as a librarian at the Library of Congress in Nairobi, but developed December Twelve Movement's library in a secret location. As a member of the Library Cell, he participated in all its information activities, as well as in all DTM political work. He also acted as Kanoru in Ngugi wa Thiongo's play *Maitu Njugira* (Translated as “Mother Sing for me”, 1981²⁷) which was banned by the Kenya Government who then detained the author. Yet thousands of people saw it at rehearsals. He was also responsible for compiling a number of underground publications circulating underground. These included *Article 5 – human rights violations*²⁸ and *Upande Mwingine* – collections of resistance activities by workers, peasants, students and others.

He also wrote and published a series of articles in Gujarati under the heading “Biographies of patriotic Asian Kenyans” which sought to counter the Government propaganda which painted South Asian communities in a very negative light. The series was written in Gujarati and published in the Gujarati magazine, *Alakmalak*.²⁹

²⁶ “Ngaahika Ndeenda, a play translated later into English as *I Will Marry When I Want*, was written by Ngugi wa Thiongo and first performed in Kenya in 1977 in the playwright's home village of Kamiriithu. The resultant furore over the politics hinted at in the play is believed to have been the direct cause of the writer's detention without trial in 1977” - Wikipedia. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ngaahika_Ndeenda. [Accessed: 22-10-12]

²⁷ The play was also video recorded.

²⁸ Refers to Article 5 of Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

²⁹ “Alakmalak”: from Gujarati: “random talk of the world”: *malak* means *mulch* (world) and *alak* means “this and that”. Can roughly be translated as “miscellany” but this does not carry the meaning of the word, “world”. Translation kindly provided by Geeta Suleman and her friends in Nairobi.



13: Nazmi Durrani: Jaswant Singh Bharaj. (*Alakmalak*) 1986

An article by a Library Cell member in Gujarati on Jaswant Singh Bharaj published in *Alakmalak* (February 1986)

Some of Nazmi Durrani's political publications include the following:

Introducing patriotic Kenyan Asians: A series in journalists, editors, publishers, printers [in Gujarati]. *Alakmalak*. Another series included in *Alakmalak* No. 11 (May, 1986) was entitled *Biographies of patriotic Asians* [in Gujarati]: “*Waesia mashujaa - wazalendo wa Kenya*”. One of the articles was about Jaswant Singh Bharaj whose very existence and achievements were hidden from the new generation of Kenyans. An English version of the article is reproduced below to indicate the content as well as the role that progressive librarians played in documenting history:

Jaswant Singh Bharaj. *Alakmalak*, February 1986 (Gujarati) pp. 10-11.
Series: "Biographies of patriotic Asian Kenyans"

Jaswant Singh lived in Molo. By profession he was a carpenter, mason, plumber, electrician, builder, radio and motor mechanic, welder, lorry driver, tractor driver and gun maker (a "karigar"). He secretly supplied material to manufacture weapons, guns and ammunition to Mau Mau fighters active in the Rift Valley area. He was charged and given severe punishment in 1954 in Nakuru court.

Jaswant Singh was born 1935 in Lucknow, Punjab. His father came to Kenya in 1914 when he got a job in the railways. Jaswant came to Kenya when he was 5 years old. He went to India in 1949 for education. He took keen interest in the anti-colonial movement in India. He was deeply influenced by the programme of the Revolutionary Party of India which believed that colonialism could only be defeated through an armed struggle

When Jaswant Singh returned to Kenya in 1953, the national liberation war was in full swing. The colonial authorities were forcing young people to enlist in the army and police to fight Mau Mau freedom fighters. They forced Jaswant to join the Police reserve force. But this young revolutionary, who hated colonialism, could not accept the oppressive behaviour of white officers towards Asian and African soldiers.

Instead, Jaswant made contacts with Mau Mau fighters. Together, they started collecting material and started manufacturing guns and other weapons. He was caught doing this work in May 1954. He was charged in colonial court of law and was sentenced to death by hanging. Progressive lawyers took up his case and managed to reduce the sentence to life imprisonment. He was imprisoned at Takwa Detention Centre on Manda Island. Other in this detention centre included Pio Gama Pinto, John Mbiyu Koinange, Achieng Oneko and M.C. Chokwe.

In the meantime, the struggle for liberation continued. One of the demands of the liberation forces was the unconditional release of all those held in detention camps. As a result, Jaswant Singh was released in 1958 after four and a half years in colonial prison. *[Author's note: This article is based on an item in Patel, Ambu (1963): "Struggle for Release Jomo and his colleagues". Nairobi, New Kenya Publishers].*

Others hidden histories revealed in the Alakmalak series were:

Yakub Deen

Owned a wood mill near Karatina. When he went to Nyandarua forest to cut trees, he took food, clothes, shoes, medicine and other essential supplies to Mau Mau fighters in the forest. After doing this for a long time, enemy spies came to know about his activities and the British authorities plotted to arrest him. This came to be known to Mau Mau activists working in colonial Government service. They informed Yakub Deen about his imminent arrest and he fled the country in time. He would have been hanged had he been caught. Yakub Deen spent his years of exile in Pakistan and returned to Kenya after independence and became a Kenya citizen.

Hasan Manji

Ran transport business in Karatina. During the course of war of liberation, Hasan supplied food and other essential requirements to families of those fighting in the forest or who were in colonial detention centres. At the end of the war, he was the Kanu candidate for his locality. About 15 years ago when he died [1971?], people from all over came to the funeral in over 20 lorries as a mark of respect.

Kenya, fight for freedom, a history reader. 21pp. A short history of the struggle for freedom in Kenya aimed mainly at children. Unpublished].

Katokati no samaya. 1986. Nairobi. (Gujarati play). Translated into English by the author as *Days of Emergency* but not published. "This is a script of a play in Gujarati, set in the mid-1950s. It records an

encounter between an Asian family living in the Eastleigh area of Nairobi and a group of Mau Mau freedom-fighters". Salvadori, Cynthia (1989) p. 349.



14: Nazmi Durrani: Katokati no samai (play in Gujarati)

Tame jano cho? [Do you know?] *Alakmalak* February 1986. p. 21. Includes the following: "We are taught in European history books that the route from Europe to East Africa and from East Africa to India was discovered by Vasco da Gama. But do you know there has been relations between East Africa and India for thousands of years. In addition, it was a Gujarati sailor who showed Vasco da Gama the route from Malindi to Calicut."

Nazmi Durrani also wrote many resistance poems in English and Kiswahili and had them published in various newspapers under assumed names. He also collected a large number of resistance poems entitled *Tunakataa!*.

An important historical account that Nazmi Durrani wrote was on Pio Gama Pinto. Originally published in *Alakmalak* (Nairobi) in Gujarati, in its December 1985 issue, it was translated into English

by Naila Durrani and published in *Awaaz* ³⁰ in a special issue to mark 40th anniversary of Pinto's death. The timing of the article's original publication is particularly significant as the previous year the Government had attacked another author for also writing about Pinto. Nazmi Durrani chose to publish it in Gujarati in a small magazine, as the earlier one had been published in English in a mainstream daily newspaper. In the conclusion of the article, the author provides not only an insight into the stand taken by Pio Gama Pinto, but his own desire to challenge the information blockade against progressive political information.

Pinto believed that for a country to get political independence was only the first step. After that, further action needed to be taken to improve the basic living conditions of the ordinary citizens. It would be necessary to remove the economic control of the foreign banks and multinational and commercial corporations over the country. Along with this, further steps would have to be taken to ensure that the country's wealth did not fall or remain in the hands of the few but was distributed to all the people.

It is inevitable that any Kenyan patriot holding such beliefs develops many deadly enemies. On 24 February 1965, those cowardly enemies shot and assassinated Pio Gama Pinto for being a brave and patriotic Kenyan. Pinto died on the spot and became a political martyr.

Progressive performative works

The progressive librarianship movement in Kenya clearly saw its work as going beyond books, and used communication as well as informal education, increasing awareness and expanding people's horizons as part of its professional work. Such activities actively linked library work with the political sphere.

In this section we look at the use of drama by the Library Cell, linking hands with the cultural activists.

³⁰ *Awaaz* (Nairobi, 2005, no. 1, pp. 16-22)

Our country, Kenya

Drama was used as a tool of learning and entertainment by some members of the December Twelve Library Cell in early 1980s. One such activity was the production of a play in Gujarati, અમારો દેશ – કેન્યા (Our country, Kenya). The play was “presented by KG2 (Mrs P. Virani’s class)” at the Aga Khan Nursery School in Nairobi and held on 26 November 1983. It was produced and directed by Naila Durrani and the 23 performers – whose names are listed in the Programme – were children of the kindergarten class (about 5 year olds).



15: Amaro desh, Kenya (children’s play in Gujarati) 1983

The cover of the cyclostyled programme has a large map of Kenya with the title of the play in the centre. On the left side is a woman with a gun (representing the freedom struggle) and a man with a panga on the right (representing peasant struggles). At the bottom is a row of boys and girls holding hands. The publicity provides a synopsis:

This historical sketch, adopted for the stage especially for kindergarten children, juxtapositions a typically dogmatic/strict type of schooling versus a freer, more meaningful education imparted from the home threshold (by a grandparent as personified guardian of cultural heritage). In so doing, we are taken across the highlights of Kenya's history which in fact is the essence of the play.

The heroes are the masses portrayed by all the children. The dialogue is punctuated by songs which enlighten the audience and enrich the plot. Two of the songs are in Gujarati, one in Hindi and one in Kutchi.

The language used to present the sketch is Gujarati, the aim being to promote our country's rich cultural heritage of numerous languages.

The significance of the play can be considered from a number of aspects. The content of education in Kenyan school had kept out any issues around its history, particularly from a progressive perspective. The play broke this barrier by tackling the history from a working peoples' perspective. The use of drama as an educational tool was also promoted when mainstream education did not use its full potential. The involvement of children and young people in developing and participating in their own education was another barrier challenged by the play, by involving young people to become active learners, not only of their own history, but also in a language they had not been taught in schools – Gujarati – which was learnt as part of the play by even those not from a South Asian background. The play pointed to a new, progressive way of creatively teaching children a content that had relevance to their own environment, and in a way they found entertaining, not as a punishment. Similarly, Nairobi's parking boys were involved in yet another activity by the cultural and information activists who presented the play – this was the play "Portrait of survival", yet another play in which the Library Cell was involved. This play was acted and developed by the parking boys themselves with encouragement and support of the progressive activists. Unfortunately, documentation about the play is not currently available, indicating a difficulty that progressive activists face in recording their history.

Sehemu ya Utungaji – the creative wing

Progressive librarianship requires the use of creative energies on the part of library activists. This is essential as years of “There is no alternative” (TINA) propaganda by conservative librarianship tends to deaden the minds of library workers whose horizons are limited by an authoritarian approach to librarianship. But even if the minds of librarians are open to new ideas and experiences, and many no doubt are, the avenues of putting these ideas into practice, for experimentation, are limited by the practice of conservative librarianship. This is yet another challenge faced by progressive librarianship in breaking out of the do’s and don’ts of conservatism. A challenge to conservative librarianship has to be, in the first place, in the cultural aspect so as to liberate minds and thoughts before progressive policies and actions become possible.

It is in this context that the progressive librarianship movement in Kenya developed the creative wing – Sehemu ya Utungaji³¹ – of the *University of Nairobi Library Magazine*. But the struggle was not only against conservative librarianship: it was also with the restricted and conservative political situation at a national level. It is in this conservative library and political context that the cultural aspects of the progressive librarianship movement in Kenya are examined.

Conditions in Kenya in late 1970s and early 1980s were not conducive in political terms for free publishing of books and journals or of holding public conferences, lectures, meetings and debates. There was, however, a very small chink open in terms of films and theatre that could be used for a brief period. Indeed, the KANU government had stuck hard at theatre when it razed perhaps the largest open air theatre in Africa at Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre and arrested or forced into exile many of these behind the pioneering theatre movement there.

This “small chink” was used by the Library Cell at the University of Nairobi for a number of activities, including organising progressive film shows as well as producing progressive plays. This was through the creation of Sehemu ya Utungaji, the creative wing of the *University of Nairobi Library Magazine*. The reason for the formation of Sehemu

³¹ From Kiswahili. “Sehemu”: n. part, portion, piece; “Tunga”: v. (2) form by arranging, compose, bring materials or ingredients together, construct, connect, make. “Utungaji”: ability to compose, &c; (2) act of arranging, composition. [A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary. Nairobi: Oxford University Press. (1939: 1979).

was initially to provide artwork for the *University of Nairobi Library Magazine*. However, it soon expanded its work in other areas. Among its early ventures was the showing of progressive films to workers and peasants in a semi-rural area just outside the City. The shows were organised by Sehemu as part of the work of the Kabete Library serving the Faculties of Agriculture and Veterinary Science of the University of Nairobi at the Kabete Campus, about 16 km. from the city centre. The film shows were held in the lecture theatre at the campus and took place in 1981. This was an important departure for the progressive librarianship movement from the conservative service in Kenya in a number of ways. The use of film shows as a way of meeting information and learning needs of local communities was one such departure. Another was the fact that the doors of a major academic institution were opened for the first time to a non-academic – worker and peasant – audience. But perhaps the most significant point was the content of the films. Three films were shown in the Black Man's Land film trilogy: *White man's country*, *Mau Mau* and *Kenyatta*. These were produced and directed by Anthony Howarth and David R. Koff, and were written by David R. Koff. The significance of showing these films was that they were frowned upon by the KANU Government at the time and even the normal showing of the films was extremely difficult, if not impossible.

The question then is what was so "dangerous" in the content of the films that the Government actively discouraged showing these films. This has to do with the entire direction that Kenya took following the Mau Mau war of liberation. The aims of the movement were distorted and its significance minimised by the independent Kenya Government which even banned any mention of Mau Mau in the public sphere. The films not only brought the struggle for independence to the public arena, but also started a debate about the interpretation given to the struggle itself. In any other situation the following publicity information about the film would be considered inoffensive and normal. But in the Kenyan situation, any discussion on the liberation struggle brought the issues of land distribution and lack of freedom to the national forum. This indirectly challenged those who benefited hugely from the "fruits of uhuru" (independence) while the working people, who had sacrificed for the struggle, ended up in dire poverty. The publicity for the film "Mau Mau" explained what the film was all about, indicating one reason why the elite were unhappy with its content:

But what was Mau Mau? A movement based, according to the British Colonial Secretary, on a “perverted nationalism and a sort of nostalgia for barbarism”? Or the Land Freedom Army, an organized political and military response to repression and armed aggression? Using newsreel and previously inaccessible archive footage, and drawing on interviews with participants on both sides, *Mau Mau* examines the myth and the reality of Africa’s first modern guerrilla war.

Such open discussions could not be allowed in Kenya where even the mention of the words “Mau Mau” was banned. Similarly, as late as 1984, bringing to public debate the life and achievement of Pio Gama Pinto, a socialist activist in the struggle for real independence and who was assassinated in 1965, would lead to exiling of the present author. As for the *Black Man’s Land* films, the co-director and writer, David Koff (2012) recalls the difficulties they faced in showing the films:

White Man’s Country was translated into Swahili and shown by the government mobile film unit around the country in the 1970s (and perhaps afterwards). It was also shown on VOK [Voice of Kenya] television. But the *Mau Mau* film was expressly barred from television by Kenyatta himself, after some stalwart producers at VOK had taken it to Gatundu for pre-screening and approval - they not only left without approval but without the print itself!

The fear among the ruling classes of addressing the issues raised by *Mau Mau* was so intense that the *Black Man’s Land* films had to wait until 2009 for a public broadcast, and even then not on the national TV and only with a strong support from a national campaign. Here is David Koff (2012) again:

All three films were ultimately broadcast on television in Kenya, but not until 2009 by the privately owned Citizen TV network, as part of a campaign to support the reparations movement for *Mau Mau* veterans and their families.

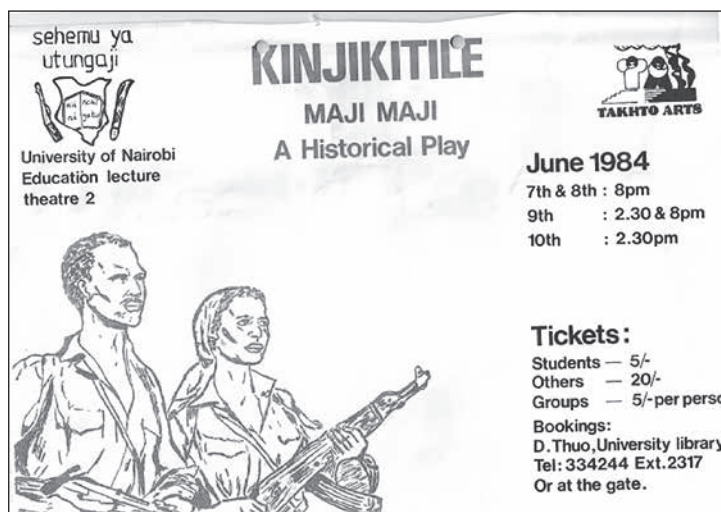
The above points to yet another departure for the progressive librarianship movement: the linking of information and learning role

of public libraries with history and politics, an aspect that remains outside the remit of the conservative librarianship work even today. While the organised, above ground political parties and activists found it difficult to show these films, the Library Cell could do so because it chose the correct audience (workers and peasants), the correct content (politics and history) and a correct time before total clampdown on any democratic activities. It was also outside the national limelight that mainstream theatres and cinemas could not avoid.

The film shows proved extremely popular with the working people in Kabete and the shows ran to full houses. This points to yet more lessons that the progressive librarianship learnt. First, that the language of the film (English) was no barrier to many peasants who spoke no English. This was partly because the message of the film was in the moving images, not only in the spoken word, and partly because the worker-peasant solidarity created instant translators among those who did speak English who quickly began translating key messages from the films. Again, the organisers had no funds for publicising the film shows, but this was no barrier as the information about the shows and its content was quickly and efficiently carried around local households and workplaces by word of mouth, having been initiated by some Sehemu and library workers who either lived in the area or had close contacts with residents.

Some of these lessons were then used for the play *Kinjikitile, Maji Maji* that the Sehemu produced a few years later. But the lessons were also planted in the minds of all library workers and members of the Library Cell as to the direction for future library work. This linking of library work with drama, films and other cultural activities was then evident in the progressive librarianship activities seen in England, particularly with the Quality Leaders Project (Youth) as examined later in this book.

Kinjikitile, Maji Maji



16: Publicity for the play "Kinjikitile, Maji Maji" (1984)

In June 1984, Sehemu ya Utungaji formed a partnership with a City drama group, Takhto Arts, and produced the play *Kinjikitile, Maji Maji*. The play was directed by Naila Durrani. A press release explains Sehemu's involvement in the play:

Sehemu ya Utungaji consists of a group of patriotic librarians who have also sought to make information services available to the people of Kenya. The group feels that the information services today are a continuation of colonial practices and have not been changed to answer the needs of the people of Kenya ... In order to provide an outlet to the creative energies of library staff in Kenya, a creative wing [of the *University of Nairobi Library Magazine*] was created. This is the Sehemu ya Utungaji, which brings together all creative activities, ranging from painting, drawing, creative writing, creative awareness through film shows, plays etc. ... the whole range of activities has clarified many ideas about information services that are relevant in Kenya today. We hope these new ideas can be put into practice. Our aim is that these new ideas should be translated into action.

Our involvement in the play *Kinjikitile* is a reflection of our belief that information about ourselves, past and present, is a basic human right. Its dissemination should not be confined to the print medium as is the case today. Other media, such as the theatre, can be equally (if not more) effective, especially in the context of modern Kenya. (Sehemu ya Utungaji and Takhto Arts. 1984a).

It was clear that the aims of the producers went beyond the conservative theatre in the tradition of “art for art’s sake”. The relevance that they sought involved increasing awareness and learning on the part of audiences. *Viva* (1984) reproduced the publicity issued by Sehemu which explains the difference:

Conservatively there are two opposing views in Kenya as to the functions of the theatre. One group sees it as pure entertainment, whilst the other regards it as a medium of communication through which ideas, experiences, knowledge and information are exchanged.

...plays in this category (theatre as entertainment) are totally removed from the realities of Kenya life. Many of them either ignore the basic contradictions of our society, or deal with minor issues which cannot be related to Kenyan arts and culture realistically.

The depiction of society as it is or as it was is the focus of the other theatrical trend in Kenya. This recognises the basic function of theatre as that of communication and education.

The situation in theatre and has much in common with the situation in librarianship. Both have opposing trends of conservative and progressive aspects. Theatre has its “traditional” wing opposing the “communication for education” wing. There is a similar difference between the conservative and progressive wings of librarianship.

The approach taken by the progressive librarianship movement in Kenya was to build a bridge between theatre and libraries – just as the film show examined earlier had done the same for films and libraries. This was based on a belief that they complement each other in their

joint endeavour to inform and educate. This is also in keeping with the "Theatre of the Oppressed" tradition. In this the progressive library and theatre movements in Kenya, as shown in the *Sehemu ya Utungaji* and *Takhto Arts* cooperation reflected Boal's approach:

...theatre is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them. Those who try to separate theatre from politics try to lead us into error – and this is a political attitude.

... the theatre is a weapon. A very efficient weapon. For this reason one must fight for it. For this reason the ruling classes strive to take permanent hold of the theatre and utilize it as a tool for domination. In so doing, they change the very concept of what "theatre" is. But the theatre can also be a weapon for liberation. (Boal, 1979).

It is for this reason that the Programme included "additional material" which provided content for further learning and to increase awareness:

Appended to this programme are the following articles which we hope will give you a deeper understanding of the history of *Maji Maji* as well as of the theatre scene in Kenya today. This is in keeping with our belief that theatre is part of a larger educational process in which drama and print medium join hands. The articles are:

1. *Maji Maji: the Tanzania people's war of national liberation against German colonialism, 1904-1907.* Reproduced from *Sauti ya Kamukunji*, May 1984 and written by Shiraz Durrani.
2. "Relevant theatre in Kenya today". [*Sehemu ya Utungaji* and *Takhto Arts*, 1984b]. 4pp.
3. *Maji Maji Ilikomboa Tanzania* (Kiswahili: *Maji Maji defended Tanzania*"]. Reproduced from the Nairobi Kiswahili daily, *Taifa Leo*. 26-05-1984.

The play was aimed at the general public but special attention was paid to students and workers. This was reflected in the ticket prices. While the normal charge was Kenya shillings 20/-, a circular sent to all schools and many working class areas in and around Nairobi mentioned special group charges, "we have arranged special rates for group bookings: five shillings (5/-) per student as well as teachers..." This was a way of encouraging co-operation, as opposed to the individualism encouraged by capitalism. It proved a very popular approach and a large number of students organised themselves to purchase tickets and attend the play in groups. At the same time, many workers from local factories also took advantage of the special group charges.

The script of the play was taken from the original play *Kinjikitile*, but was adopted by Naila Durrani and Shiraz Durrani to reflect Kenyan reality. This version was therefore called *Kinjikitile, Maji Maji*. "Maji" is the Kiswahili term for water and was used as a call for unity by the Maji Maji resisters in their anti-colonial struggles against German colonialism.



17: Scene from the play "Kinjikitile, Maji Maji". Nairobi (1984)

The writing, production, publicity and other aspects of the play provided useful practical learning experience for many librarians. It broke the barrier created by the conservative librarianship between books and creative activities. More important, it provided library workers with a positive avenue to be active in their librarianship practice, something that had not been provided during their training or in work experiences. It also helped to create a new consciousness about the social role of libraries and librarians, just as the “Black Man’s Land” films shows had done earlier at the Kabete Campus.

Illustrations for the planned History of Kenya

The Sehemu ya Utungaji did not confine its work to producing artwork for *Sauti ya Wakutubi*. Besides producing plays and organising film shows, it also planned to write and perform a new play. Its other plans included preparing a pictorial book on the history of Kenya. Sehemu members were active in planning issue no. 5 of *Sauti ya Wakutubi* whose focus was to be on young people and their information needs. Other members were researching the General Kago, another leader of the Mau Mau movement whose history was being forgotten through historical neglect. None of these came to fruition as the Kenya Special Branch scuppered the over ground work of the Library Cell in 1984.

The appeal of the Sehemu was to all those who felt that Kenya’s history had been distorted or hidden by colonial and neo-colonial governments. Libraries had not taken up the challenge to collect and pass on relevant facts, events and information about the freedom struggle. Sehemu members thus became not only active librarians, but also historians, illustrators – and teachers.

The planned pictorial book was on the history of Kenya aimed at young people. The overall title of the project was *Kuvunja Minyororo* – “Breaking the chains”. Artwork for the book had already been started. Hand-drawn pictures of prominent liberation activists and historical buildings were drawn by Sehemu members. The ones reproduced below were drawn by a Sehemu member, Osswago who worked at the Kabete Campus of the University of Nairobi. His involvement showed that the Sehemu had an impact beyond the narrow confines of the

library as he was not a library worker but was still active in the work of Sehemu ya Utungaji. This short selection shows illustrations of a number of liberation fighters active in the struggle for liberation, including some active in the trade union movement. Also reproduced is a picture of Kipande House which became a symbol of working class activism and unity. While these artwork was being created by some members of Sehemu, others had started writing brief histories of events and individuals to be included in the pictorial book.



18: Artwork for Kuvunja Minyororo:
Bildad Kaggia by Osswago



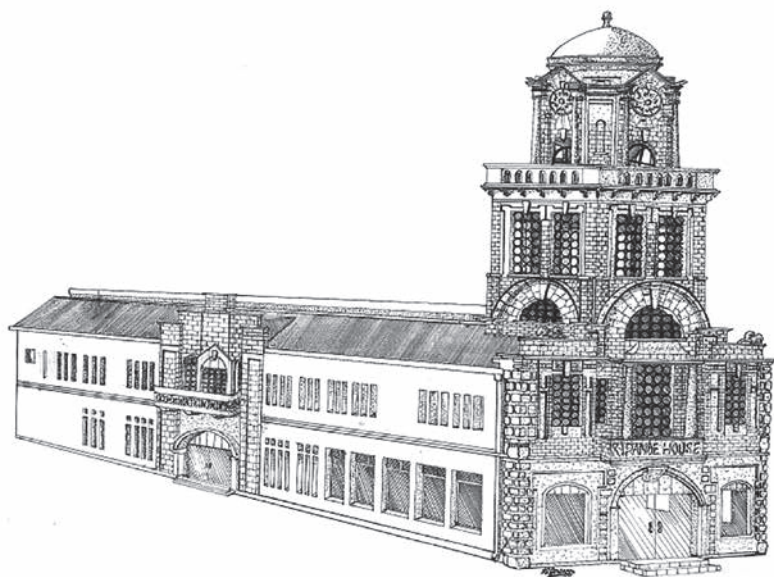
19: Artwork for Kuvunja Minyororo:
Kumba Karumba - Osswago



20: Artwork for Kuvunja Minyororo:
Chege Kibachia by Osswago



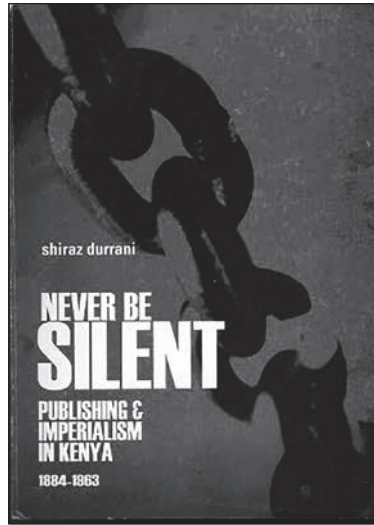
21: Artwork for Kuvunja Minyororo:
Makhan Singh by Osswago



22: Artwork for Kuvunja Minyororo: Kipande House by Osswago

In developing a number of “new” activities for librarians under Sehemu ya Utungaji, the Library Cell was indeed a pioneer in many ways. It organised workshops on what librarianship should be all about, it organised film shows to provide access to hidden history, it produced plays on socially and politically relevant subjects, it started planning the writing of books and documenting histories for people. In all this, it connected with people in different ways, not least within the walls of libraries.

Never be silent



23: Shiraz Durrani: Never be Silent (2006)

An important difference between the two situations we consider in this book – in Kenya and in Britain – is the lack of basic democratic avenues of communication in the former. It is possible, in theory at least, to publish books on any subject with any perspective and world outlook in Britain, but such was not the case in Kenya. This was, of course, during the pre-Internet and World Wide Web days and the easy access to communications technologies was not available. As we shall see below, activist librarians used whatever possibilities existed for open, democratic publication. But this still restricted the content and the quantity of progressive publications. The underground movement such as the December Twelve Movement (DTM) therefore developed its own documentation centre as well as resources to print, publish and distribute its message. These were developed underground as open activities of this nature were not possible.

An important development took place in 1986 with the formation of an alternative publishing centre in London. Some members of the Library Cell were forced into exile over the previous few years. This opened up new possibilities in the scope of progressive librarianship. The expanded scope of the Library Cell made it possible to carry out

work which the limited circumstances in Kenya did not allow. This was at two levels: the political work of DTM and the consolidation of research, documentation and publishing work, which were at the core of the Library Cell's activities.

Some members of the Library cell joined hands with other activists in London and set up Vita³² Books in 1986. Although an independent publishing and documentation centre and not part of the DTM, Vita Books supported some publishing activities of DTM and Mwakenya. According to its publicity, Vita Books was:

... a small, alternative publisher specialising in books on anti-imperialist struggles and the establishment of just and democratic societies. It seeks to give voice to those who otherwise would remain voiceless.

Among its publications are:

- Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986): Writing against neo-colonialism.
- Durrani, Shiraz (1986): Kimaathi, Mau Mau's first Prime Minister of Kenya³³
- Durrani, Shiraz (2006): Never Be Silent: publishing and imperialism in Kenya 1886-1963.³⁴

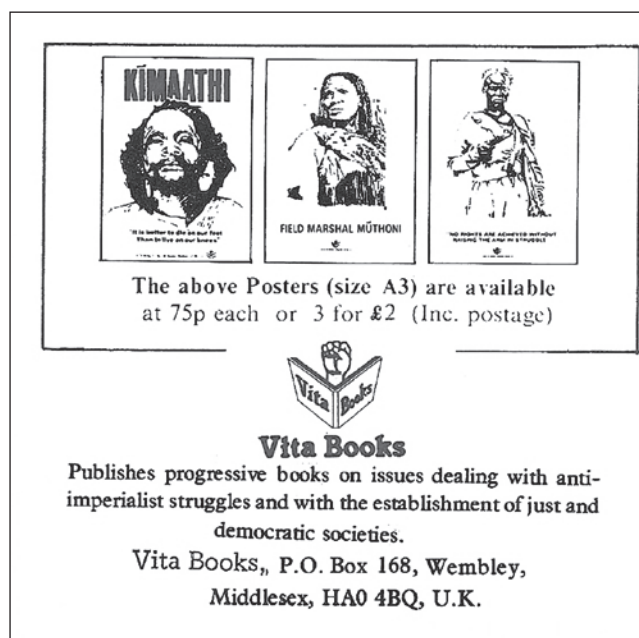
Vita Books also published posters which included the ones on Kimaathi, the leader of the Mau Mau movement, with the slogan "It is better to die on our feet than to live on our knees"; Mau Mau fighter Muthoni; an unnamed armed woman fighter from Northern Kenya resisting colonialism, with the slogan "No battles are won without raising arms". For a while Vita Books published books in co-operation with the Mau Mau Research Centre, then based in New York. Vita books publications were available initially through the underground network

³² Vita: Kiswahili for "war" as in *vita vya ukombozi*: war of liberation – in this case liberation of the mind.

³³ Written in Kenya, it could not be published there because of the prevailing political situation. However, a short version was published as an article in the University of Nairobi student magazine, *Kamukumji*.

³⁴ Most of the research and writing was done in Kenya before 1984. Again, it could not be published in Kenya at that time.

of progressive booksellers and activists. Later, when the political situation had changed, they were available through mainstream bookshops. *Never Be Silent* (Durrani, 2006a) was also printed in Kenya with its launch in Nairobi attended by Dr Kilemi Mwiria, the Assistant Minister in the Ministry of Education Science and Technology.



24: Vita Books posters

Indeed the launch of *Never be silent* in Nairobi in 2006, provided some useful lessons on what progressive librarians should be involved in. Makokha (2006) explains:

Last week, I went to the launch of Shiraz Durrani's new book, *Never Be Silent: Publishing & Imperialism in Kenya (1884-1963)* and arrived just in time to hear the evening's guest speaker, Dr Kilemi Mwiria, begin his address.

He spoke passionately about the importance of reading for culture and development, and about the place of the book and new ideas in the struggle to free humanity and better its condition.

More importantly, he dwelt on the theme of speaking up in the face of oppression, ignorance and impunity, adding that the voices of liberation could only be heard if more Kenyans did not leave everything to politicians; if more of them were involved in what was happening, if more of them were offering criticism and praise, if more of them were running for political office in order to contribute directly to creating policies – such as a national book policy.

In keeping with the commitment of the Library Cell to provide free access to information to people, *Never be Silent* is available on open access.³⁵

These books, and the progressive library movement itself, played an important role in challenging the Western-orientated interpretation of Kenyan history, thereby fulfilling an important function of a library from a progressive perspective. A selection from reviews of some of the some books published by Vita Books highlights these aspects. It should be noted that both the books, Kimaathi (1986) and *Never be Silent* (2006a) were written in Kenya, but could not be published there at the time. It is also noteworthy that a local publisher, in partnership with an Indian publisher, was exploring the possibility of publication in 1984, but this was scuppered with the Special Branch harassment of the author and his subsequent flight into exile. Some reviews of Vita Books publications highlight the role of progressive publishing and information in the struggle for liberation. For example, Hjelmervik, (1993) says:

The official histories of the period, in particular those concerned with the period from 1952 to 1956, tend to portray the freedom struggle as barbaric, sinister and awesome, focusing on, among other things, the Oath of Unity which members had to swear upon joining the KLFA [Kenya Land and Freedom Army]. It is a key virtue of this book that it brings out the fact that the KFLA waged a highly organised, consistent and dedicated struggle for national liberation. ... [W]hat was most impressive about the struggle, and this

³⁵ Available at: <http://eprints.rclis.org/8127/>

is clearly brought out by Durrani's study, is the high level of organisation, both politically and militarily, of the KFLA ...

This booklet, along with such classics accounts as D. Barnett's and K. Njama's *Mau Mau from within*, is a fitting tribute to the pioneers in the struggle against imperialism and their martyred leader, Dedan Kimaathi. (p. 14).

Just as libraries have been manipulated to serve corporate interests, the publishing industry as a whole has undergone a similar fate. Just as libraries need a revolutionary change to free themselves from the corporate power holders, the publishing sector also needs a similar change. Indeed, both the sectors would be stronger if they joined hands in their common struggles. Libraries in Kenya could not connect with the people with relevant ideas, views and experiences. Similarly, publishers in Kenya also could not connect with the people with relevant ideas, views and experiences. The December Twelve Movement's Library Cell, in a small way, broke out of this corporate mould and created its own alternative, people-orientated policies and practices in the library world. Vita Books, in a small way, similarly broke out of this corporate mould and created its own alternative, people-orientated policies and practices in the publishing world. The two "talked" to each other, learnt from each other's experiences and gave strength to each other. They both worked on the basis of never being silent.

Sauti ya Wakutubi: the voice of progressive librarians

What follows is a case study examining workshop activities and specific publications that were central to the development of the progressive librarianship movement in Kenya. It is from such experiences that many of the concepts examined in this book come from. In addition, the case study provides an example of a teaching and learning experience that is essential if progressive librarianship thoughts are to take roots among library workers and professionals.

One avenue of disseminating progressive views on librarianship was through writing journal articles for publishing in Kenya and overseas. This had the advantage that it created an additional credibility for the views on progressive librarianship in an official

environment which did not welcome alternate views. The articles published in overseas journals had the added advantage of acting as “security” against the Special Branch police interrogators. Indeed when the Special Branch interrogated the author in September 1984, one of their requirements was to see the original publications in which these articles were published. They wanted proof that they had some legitimacy overseas, since “no librarian [in Kenya] would write such material – even historians did not do so”.

Such articles provided relevant reading and educational material for young professionals as well as for general library staff who welcomed alternative views as more relevant to the Kenyan situation. They were encouraged not only to follow these alternative theories and ideas, but also to become activists in implementing them. However, in a politically controlled situation with a close-knit “professional” librarians and their professional body (Kenya Library Association - KLA), it was not easy to become active with progressive ideas. In addition, library workplaces were extremely hierarchical and tightly controlled, as was the country as a whole. While it was relatively easy to influence and inform middle and lower level library workers with the progressive ideas contained in the journal articles produced by the Library Cell, it was not so easy to get them active in implementing these ideas as libraries were controlled by conservative ideas and librarians. The Library Cell realised this limitation and created a number of structures, events and activities in which those interested in the progressive ideas could become active. It created new avenues and opened up new opportunities for those interested to implement alternative ideas. These included attending and presenting papers at library workshops, taking part in various activities associated with theatre and drama as well as different aspects of getting involved in the *Library Magazine* and its creative wing, *Sehemu ya Utungaji*.

But the voice of progressive librarianship did not exist only in the underground publications and activities. It was present above ground as well. It was encouraged and guided by activities of the December Twelve Movement’s Library Cell. However, its work was made easier as political consciousness among working people was high as a result of the sharpening contradictions between classes in Kenya and as a result of increasing marginalisation, inequality, landlessness and unemployment facing the working people. Indeed,

the entire history of over 500 years of resistance against colonialism and particularly the Mau Mau war of national liberation has given Kenyans a heightened awareness of social, political and economic factors affecting their lives. The section below examines some of the early over-ground publications on progressive librarianship. The range of issues considered and the broad spread of progressive ideas is evident in these publications.

Among the early activities undertaken by the Library Cell was organising the first Library Workshop on the theme “Kabete Library and Agri-Vet ³⁶ information Workshop”. It was held on 21 September 1979. One of the papers presented at the workshop was entitled “Agri-vet information: production, organisation, storage and retrieval”. It was initially issued as Workshop Document No. 6 and later published in the *University of Nairobi Library Magazine* (Nairobi) No.2 (23 - 37) 1979.

While the purpose of the paper was to introduce “librarians at the University of Nairobi to agri-vet information”, it carried a radical message rarely, if ever, heard in the mainstream information field in Kenya. It starts by explaining a different theory of information than the one prevalent at that time:

How information is produced

Information accumulates as time goes on and as humans make history. Basically all information is produced in the course of human struggles with nature on the one hand to produce food, clothing, shelter and other material needs, and on the other hand, to protect that material wealth i.e. the struggles with other humans who aim to appropriate to themselves the wealth produced during the first struggle with nature. All knowledge developed historically through the contradictions of humans with nature and in society is the property of the people to be used and developed further. This knowledge helps to solve the new and developing contradictions with nature and in society, as every new historical period presents new struggles for the production and protection of

³⁶ The term “agri-vet” was used in recognition of the fact that the Kabete Library served the two Faculties of the University of Nairobi based at its Kabete Campus: Agriculture and Veterinary Science.

material wealth. Librarians officially store and distribute this knowledge: libraries are official keepers and distributors of knowledge which is people's property. (Durrani, 1979b).

The article went on to discuss other aspects of librarianship which have been prominent in recent years in the sector, for example, neutrality and commodification of information:

The second aspect of knowledge is that it is produced socially, i.e. it is produced by people themselves in their two struggles, and it is thus the property of the people to be used to solve new contradictions in connection with the production and protection of material wealth. But in our society knowledge has become a commodity that is bought and sold. Thus it has been made a private property of some individuals and nations who trade in it. Imperialist nations sell the much needed scientific knowledge at such a high rate that we can hardly afford to buy it, although they may have extracted this knowledge from us in the first place.

The article next turns to the damage that imperialism has done to the industrial base and development in Kenya – an aspect as much the remit for librarians as for “development scientists”:

The importance of agri-vet in Kenya

One of the basic human material needs is food. This is directly satisfied by agri-vet industries. But other material needs like clothing, shelter are also satisfied, indirectly, by agri-vet. This in itself shows the importance of agri-vet in our lives. But this is not all. A long history of exploitation and plunder of our resources by colonialism and imperialism has resulted in the destruction of the base of our industries (e.g. the metal and *panga* industries and the gun making industries mentioned earlier). Had these been allowed to develop, today they would have been thriving, and could have been the foundation on which we could have lifted ourselves out of the present state of non-development. Thus our dependence on agri-vet is even more as there is

no industrial base that can support any real development, as the present industries are mostly tools of foreign finance which strangle any initiative to build a truly national industrial base. It is also true that even agri-vet is very much under the control of the same foreign finance which seeks to maximise its profits at the expense of the basic material needs of the majority of our people.

There then follows a discussion on how (progressive) librarians can help in resolving some of the social and political issues mentioned above:

Thus to increase production drastically almost overnight, it may not be necessary to invest very large sums of money: better dissemination of agri-vet information which is already sitting in our library shelves can achieve this result provided ... we make available to the peasants this information in a form they understand and in a language they speak ...

The question of information (and other forms of) inequality have gained much prominence in Europe in the last few years. Here is what the article said about this subject:

Any discussion of agri-vet in Kenya must also take into account a basic fact about our lives: scientific and technical information is very unevenly distributed, both in terms of individuals and in terms of nationalities. While the histories of the nationalities reveal that they have a great amount of scientific and technical information, this information has been condemned by "experts" to the extent that attempts have been made to make us believe that the nationalities have no contribution to make in scientific and technical fields.

Again, at another level, knowledge and information have become commodities possessed by only the rich who can afford to buy these for themselves and their children. This is especially true in the agri-vet field where this inequality of knowledge is evident just by looking at the differences in the large sized farms owned by foreign based plantation estates, and the small farms owned by foreign based plantation estates,

and the small farms of the middle and small peasants of all the nationalities. The former not only have the financial backing from banks and other financial institutions, but also have access to the latest scientific and technical information from local and foreign sources. The middle and small peasants not only do not have access to these, but on the contrary are at the mercy of small and large foreign financial and middlemen companies who leave the peasants with little or no surplus to enable them to buy scientific knowledge.

The implications of these facts on library services as centres of communication are many. If we, as librarians, are to play our part in the development of our country we should make sure we play our part in the transfer of knowledge which we store but cannot be reached by those who need it the most. Let us begin to transfer knowledge and in this practice learn the obstacles that have so far prevented us from giving our knowledge to the national population.

The use of appropriate language was also another concern of the progressive library movement in Kenya. This was considered in Durani (2006). In the above article, the use of the term “nationalities” is used and explained:

We have used the terms “*nationality* knowledge” and *nationality* librarianship” to denote what the colonialists formerly called tribal or vernacular knowledge and librarianship. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a tribe as “a group of primitive clans under a recognised chief”. Ethnic groups within nationalities were called sub-tribes.

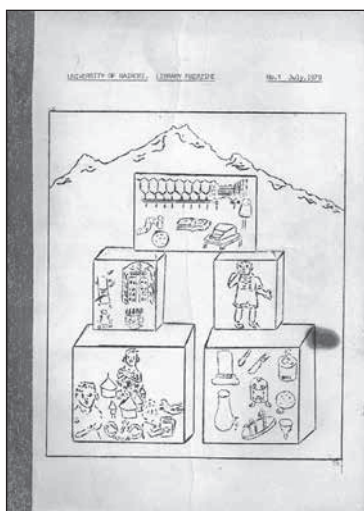
“Vernacular” refers to “language of home-born slave”: the reference being to Roman times when the language of locally bred slaves was considered inferior to the language of the masters.

The article suggests a possible way in which librarianship can become relevant to the society once again by taking the example of what it calls “nationality librarianship”:

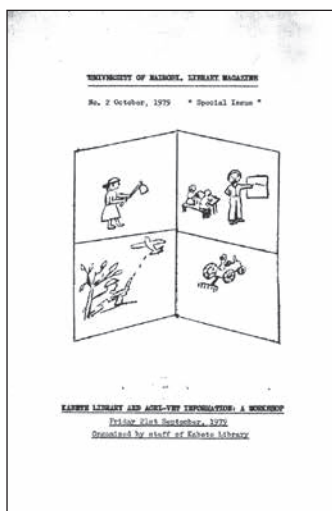
One aspect of nationality librarianship from which perhaps we can learn is that it was integrated much better with other areas of social lives of the people. It was thus better equipped to answer needs of the society. To begin with, there was not the rigid specialisation of librarianship that we see today: today this extreme specialization has cut us off from the society around us and we function in isolated buildings taking pride in our very isolation by claims of being “professionals”. Nationality librarianship considered it essential that librarians were at the same time useful members of society in many other directly productive activities. For example, one role of the elders was to collect, organise and disseminate knowledge; but this did not prevent them from playing a very active part in the everyday productive processes which were farming and animal husbandry. In the process of actual work, past knowledge was applied and tested, and new knowledge was developed. The result was that librarianship responded more positively to the information needs of the society.

The progressive librarians, then organised other workshops for library staff, with many young librarians presenting papers. The second workshop was on the theme “Libraries and Rural Development”. Such workshops provided an opportunity of middle and lower levels of library staff to challenge the established views on the role of libraries, both within the University and within the library profession in Kenya. They established a number of publications within the University Library service, such as *University of Library Magazine* which was later renamed *Sauti ya Wakutubi* (“Voice of Librarians”). A sister publication, called *Upashanaji* (The Disseminator), aimed to provide a forum to staff who had never before had an opportunity to write articles or express their views in publications.

An examination of some issue of the *University of Nairobi Library Magazine* (renamed *Sauti ya Wakutubi* by the 4th issue in 1984) provides an indication of the development of progressive library movement in Kenya.



25: University of Nairobi Library Magazine. No. 1 (1979)



26: University of Nairobi Library Magazine. No. 2 (1979)

The first issue of *University of Nairobi Library Magazine* (Magazine) came out in July 1979. It was a mimeographed document running to sixty two pages, with front and back hard covers with artwork by library staff. While the artwork was of rather a poor quality, it reflected a content that perhaps explains the role of the Magazine and of those behind it. The front cover consisted of illustrations with images in them: two large boxes at the base on which rest two smaller ones, topped by a third one showing a library (in this case the University of Nairobi Library). The illustrations depict the process of the production, processing and use of information in society. The background is Mount Kenya, which symbolised a Kenya free from exploitation and oppression. The artist was a member of the *Sehemu ya Utungaji*. The *Magazine* explains the front cover:

Cover design by Samwel Kinyanjui (Main Library, cataloguing section): shows the role of libraries in our society. The knowledge gained during the two struggles of humans (against nature – tree cutting) and against other humans (foreigners stealing our wealth) is passed by the elders of our nationalities to the libraries which hold information in various forms: books, records, tapes (national literature),

photographs, films. This knowledge is then passed by the libraries to the younger generation which uses this knowledge to improve material welfare of the society.

This brief explanation manages to encapsulate what progressive librarianship stood for in Kenya in 1980s. It shows the creation of information and knowledge in the course of their social and nature struggles, the collection of the information and dissemination for material welfare of society.

The artwork on back inside cover again shows the link of libraries with political struggles: it is again by Samwel Kinyanjui and depicts a concentration village under British colonial rule at the bottom; the top shows Kenyan freedom fighters defending the nation with guns and pangas, again with Mt. Kenya in the background. The caption shows the contest: "Dedan Kimathi and other freedom fighters resist imperialism".

This link with the political struggle is one feature that distinguished the progressive library movement from conservative librarianship in Kenya – as in other parts of the world.

The editorial in the issue highlighted one reason why librarians are not able to play their real role in society:

Some colleagues argue that though they feel they can do much more in distributing knowledge on subjects of interest to the national population, they are actually unable to do so as knowledge under capitalism has become the property of only the bourgeoisie. This is true, as knowledge which develops socially is continuously stolen and capitalised by individuals and resold to the society. Thus those who have money can buy that knowledge.

The editorial then goes on to urge librarians to be active in national struggles:

Thus the freedom to communicate ideas and information without interference is our democratic and constitutional right. It is the right that we librarians must practice and in that join the national population in the struggles for production and protection of national wealth.

In reviewing the Library Magazine, the African Book Publishing Record commented:

Even though this is only a simply produced mimeographed "house magazine", primary of local interest, librarians in other parts of Africa and libraries with an interest in library development in Africa may wish to subscribe ... the second number is devoted exclusively to a workshop held at the University of Nairobi's Kabete Library on library and information services in the field of agriculture and veterinary sciences, and includes all papers presented at this workshop. (ABPR).

The second issue of *University of Nairobi Library Magazine* was published in October 1979.

The cover illustration depicted agriculture in Kenya, explained by the editors:

Cover design by Gathui Manyara (Main Library, Issue Desk) expresses the role of agricultural and veterinarian information in Kenya which was the theme of the Workshop:

The background of pages from a book identifies the central role of libraries in the struggles which our society is continually engaged in.

The picture at the top left depicts a peasant woman not only producing material goods (food) in her struggle against nature but also creating knowledge in the process.

The picture at the bottom left depicts the struggles against foreigners to control our wealth and material goods which are the results of labour's struggle against nature. In the process, more knowledge is also created.

The right side pictures show the role of education in passing on the knowledge to the new generation which results in the development of new technologies, i.e. a tractor. (p.1).

By the time of the publishing of the fourth – and last – issue in September 1984, the title had been changed to *Sauti ya Wakutubi*

("Voice of librarians"). This was in keeping with a note from the Editors in issue no. 1 when they said "we hope to have a proper name for it [the Magazine] ... the name should preferably be in Kiswahili" (No. 1, p.3).



27: Sauti ya Wakutubi. No. 4 (1984)

Issue no. 4 carried the full proceedings of the second workshop, on the theme Libraries and Rural Development, held on October 2-3, 1980. The workshop ("Majadaliano") was attended by 70 delegates from 15 libraries. The Editorial, entitled "Lessons in Kenyan librarianship: leadership, management and the library worker", highlights an important aspect which distinguishes progressive librarianship from the conservative one:

The significance of the Workshop also comes from another level: while most discussions on librarianship have been dominated by high-level administrative staff of large libraries in the country, now for the first time the voice of the majority of staff at service level is being heard on issues of national importance. This is the staff which [sic] is in direct contact

with the public using the libraries. For the first time these librarians are exercising their constitutional right to hold free discussions by bringing forth their experiences from the grass-root level. (*Sauti ya Wakutubi*. No. 4, Sept. 1984).

The editorial picks up another aspect that is relevant even today, not only in the library field, but in national politics as well, the nature and function of leaders:

...leadership does not consist of giving orders which the led have to follow. The relationship of leaders and the led is not that of the slave and the slave owner, where one does the physical work to produce wealth and the other does the thinking on how the wealth is to be divided up.

The real leaders are those who follow the commands of those they lead. The leadership's role is that of organizing the resources so as to fulfil the wishes of the people. When leaders fail to obey the people and begin to impose its will on people, there emerges dictatorship.

Besides the papers presented at the workshop, the recommendations from the Workshop are important as an alternative vision and a policy framework for the progressive librarianship movement in Kenya. Discussions took place after each paper as well as at a plenary. The following section provides a flavour of the discussion, reflecting the high level of awareness and consciousness about library and related social issues among participants.

The first discussion was on a paper entitled "the University of Nairobi library's potential role in Kenyan rural development" by **Mwangi Kamonde**. Three key aspects were summarised in the discussion:

1. Type of library service needed for rural development

The discussion centred on whether library service should be aimed at a minority of people, both in urban and rural areas or at the majority of peasants and workers. The former service (for elites) would mean exclusive library service for the educated and the rich at the expense of most of the people of the country. It was then agreed that that it is

not the elite which produces development and wealth, but the working majority of people, so that it would be wrong to provide library service for the elite only ... our library service should be such that people could identify with them, which implies that they should be actively involved in evolving relevant library service ... it was thus seen that this requirement, to re-orientate library services to serve the majority of Kenyan workers and peasants implied a wide ranging change in the current library practices in the country.

2. Training of librarians to serve rural needs

The question was raised about whether we are training librarians to serve the needs of the rural areas, and specifically [the] needs of peasants.

3. The role of the University of Nairobi Library services in rural development

One of our roles is to advise the Government on information. There was no area of life where information was not important ... thus our *national* information role should not be minimised. Even the University Vice-Chancellor's guidelines on running the University was based on the Kenya Development Plan and we in the University library should see how we can help in fulfilling the goals of rural development set out in the Development Plan. A narrow interpretation of our role, one restricted within the University, was not in the best *national* interest.

Next followed discussion on a paper by **Njoroge Kanori**, "Libraries and rural development in Kenya: problems and prospects".

It was felt that as members of society, it was necessary for all librarians to discuss how to uplift the standard of living of poor people. The information we supply our users should be carefully assessed. Wrong advice and information can, for example, increase the gap between the rich and the poor, instead of decreasing it.

The issue of literacy and roles of librarians in eradicating it was also discussed. Librarians have to be in the forefront of eradicating illiteracy ... libraries should not only be providing books, because [many] people cannot read. Libraries should create a basis on which people can learn. Librarians should not simply sit at their tables or rooms and wait for people to come to them for library services. They should

move out among the people with their services.

Librarians should, through concrete investigations, find out precisely what information the people need, in which language and in what form...the Kenya National Library Service could also have discussion sessions and cultural events in the library to make their libraries centres where people can find solutions to their information needs and where they can reflect on their lives through drama, films, songs performed by themselves.

Boaz Adaji Saava: "Libraries and rural development in Kenya"

One of the reasons for lack of rural development given by foreign "experts" is that the population is "too high". This was rejected because what is at issue is not population growth but the amount of surplus wealth that trickles down to everybody. If this wealth was distributed equitably to all people in the country, there could then be development both urban and rural.

It is in this context that libraries have to play a central role. It is for the librarians to inform people how this surplus wealth could get back to them and also the reasons for their poverty ... the literacy skills are not for their own sake but to show people reasons for their poverty and how to overcome the poverty. Thus only can literacy skills lead to development.

An undesirable aspect of our present research and information practice is that information is collected from peasants through research, interviews, surveys but little goes back to the peasants in forms of practicable and usable information that can be applied by the peasants to improve their material conditions of life ... it is in finding practical ways of returning this information to peasants in appropriate languages and forms that library services can become relevant to Kenyan peasants and so make a contribution to rural development.

Two aspects of library services which could ensure provision of relevant services were discussed. One was the need to conduct local and national surveys to find out what types of library services people need. The first priority is to undertake Rural Library Surveys. The other aspect was based on [implementing] the results of these rural library surveys.

Three papers on the theme "women and libraries" were presented, as follows:

Virginia Inoti and Wanjiru Weru: "The role of women in rural development in Kenya and their need for library services".

Mary Muthoni Wanjohi: "Women and rural development: can libraries help?"

The discussions on the above papers on women were summarised under a number of topics:

1. Scope

It is through an understanding of the role of librarians in society that appropriate solutions to specific problems like those of women can be worked out and then put into practice.

Specific problems of women should not be seen in isolation. Our concern should not be with rural women only, but with urban women also but not with rich ones but *working* women, whether in towns (like factory workers, prostitutes, house workers) or in the country (e.g. peasants, plantation workers). Thus the contradiction is not between rural and urban but between poor and rich.

2. Who/what oppresses women – stating the problem

Misleading ideas have been spread by those who are exploiting our land and labour about women's oppression. One such idea is that women are oppressed by men. This view was rejected and as one participant pointed out, not all men are benefiting from oppression of women and in fact men are also looking for ways in which women and men can all develop together. Another participant pointed out that the "fight" between men and women was promoted by our enemies so as to divide and rule us [on the] bases of race and colour, nationalities. Thus dividing us on basis of sex was one of many divisive tactics of our enemy. The rich women were not only not exploited but they themselves often exploited poor women and men. If the rich women felt oppressed, it was a very superficial oppression.

The basis of their exploitation was economic and political. [This] was forced on them by the multinational companies. Such companies are the buyers of peasants' products, sellers of peasants' needs in terms of everyday necessities and they have also taken over vast acreage of land thus leaving the peasants without sufficient land. ... In the final analysis poor women as well as poor men are oppressed by the operation of neo-colonialism which is the current phase of imperialism.

3. What can be done by society?

Since the exploitation and the "problem" of women are caused by economic factors, the solution will also be economic and social.

4. What can be done by libraries?

Libraries can help not only rural women, but rural people in general by providing *relevant* information, in the *language* of the people, and in a *form* that is acceptable to the people. For all this to happen we should re-orientate librarianship to the needs of Kenyan people. Such reorientation can take place only on basis of our concrete experience in investigating library needs of the people. On the basis of this, practical suggestions were made on a number of issues, including language of collections and the form in which information was supplied. An important aspect was "relevant information". Discussion on this was wide ranging, some of which is mentioned below.

Since poverty was widespread in our society, information in our libraries should store and disseminate information on reasons of poverty, in spite of having very rich land. Libraries should be able to explain to its readers why there is exploitation and oppression and oppression in the society. For example, rural poor should be informed about their rights in the society, how in practice these rights can be realised.

One participant mentioned that he spent his school days in rural areas where local libraries were full of books and magazines such as those of Harold Robbins, Readers Digest, and Newsweek. He felt that by stocking such irrelevant material, the libraries are failing us and are not keeping us aware about our social conditions. He gave, as an example, that libraries should disseminate information as to why about 20,000 to 25,000 children die every year in Kenya from malnutrition. Speaking on the malnutrition, he disagreed with the suggestion that some of the peasants' children die of malnutrition because their parents are ignorant about scientific nutrition practices. While it is true that that they may be ignorant about the death-causing infant foods pushed on the market by the multinational companies, it is not true to say that they do not know enough about nutrition. People have been existing for centuries and they know what and how much to eat and what to avoid. That they are not getting a balanced diet is not because of their lack of knowledge but because of social and economic reasons. Relevant information for these people then is the one that explains such social and economic reasons.

These discussions highlight many of the concerns that the progressive librarianship movement needs to address if it is to challenge the monopoly held by the conservative librarianship. The first step in this work is to have open debates on what issues are critical for developing a relevant information and library service, and then have an open discussion on what possible avenues there are to resolve issues. There also needs to be a scope for bringing to wider notice relevant experiences and ideas from around the world. It is this function that these workshops performed.

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While it is not in the scope of this book to see the political situation in Kenya at the time the editorial and the magazine were published (1979-84), the extreme political repression of the period needs to be kept in mind. The Western supported KANU (Kenya African National Union)

Governments led by Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi were perhaps the most repressive regimes in Eastern Africa and used state violence against any form of opposition which functioned mostly underground during the time the magazine existed. It is in this context that the magazine, and its related activities, *Sehemu ya Utungaji, Kuuunja Minyororo* ("Breaking the chains"), the drama and film activities need to be seen. Thus when the editorial ends with the words, "the content [of the issue] has also helped to formulate the basis of this editorial", it can be seen as a way of protecting the writer as any such views can – and were – deemed dangerous by the Government. It is noteworthy, that this issue was the last one and the first Editor had to flee the country in the very month when the editorial was written, following a crackdown by the Government Special Branch. This indicates the danger the progressive librarianship movement faced in Kenya for its information and linked political work.

The above examination of the contents of *University of Nairobi Library Magazine / Sauti ya Wakutubi* shows the range and scope of progressive ideas behind the progressive librarian movement in Kenya. It should be noted, however, that the movement was not labelled "progressive" at the time, but its direction was that of progressive librarianship.

Class and gender equality issues

An important point of departure for the progressive librarianship movement in Kenya was a world outlook that clearly understood, and applied, the concept of classes and class contradictions. In contrast, the conservative librarianship movement avoided the entire issue, and claimed neutrality in the on-going class struggles. The importance of a class analysis of the information field is seen from the progressive librarianship perspective in a review of Sturges and Neill's book, "The Quiet Revolution":

... the authors have shown the correct path in not seeing library work in isolation but to see the overall context of information in society. At the same time, the book stops at this *information* context without seeing the information itself in its wider *political* context. The reasons why no

relevant library and information services have emerged in practice are to be found not in the failure of African librarians but because of imperialist exploitation of Africa, which has affected every aspect of life, including information. For the authors, it is enough to accept the “inescapable reality of poverty” of Africa. It is not necessary for them to question why the richest continent in the world is at the same time the poorest. But unless this question is addressed, it will not be possible to understand why Africa produces only one per cent of the world’s books. Nor will it be possible to devise a relevant information service. The failure to understand the class contradictions in Africa leads to yet another shortcoming. The title of the book leads one to expect an analysis of the *struggle* in the information field. But a struggle implies a battle between two opposing sides. Nowhere in the book are we shown who is confronting who and over what issues. (Durrani, 1991).

The progressive librarianship movement in Kenya, on the other hand, linked the class struggles with equality as a whole and saw the liberation of women and the search for economic and social equality as concerns that librarians should be involved in. Thus the first issue of the *University of Nairobi Library Magazine* (July 1979) indicated its stand on these issues in a number of ways. As we have seen, the front and inside back covers depict lives of workers and peasants, and include women in this depiction. The content of the articles also reflected this awareness. For example, P. Muturi’s article is entitled “some thoughts on the problems of working women in Kenya”. Saying that “women are one of the most underpaid and overworked sections of the population”, she goes on to give some details of lives of working women:

It is not uncommon to find that a working mother has to wake up at 4.30 a.m. to wash clothes, prepare breakfast, wash and perform other duties before she reports for work at 8 a.m. (or even earlier at 7 a.m. for some of us). After a full working day up to 5 p.m., she returns home only to start another working day with household duties which are not paid for, nor recognised as work. She retires at midnight or

even later very exhausted and gets no more than 4-5 hours of sleep before the whole cycle starts again... the worst part of the problems of the working mother is that the society does not even seem to notice these problems.

Muturi suggests an activist approach to resolving the problem:

... it is time we working women of Kenya solve problems facing us ourselves. Our husbands and fathers of our children will never take up their responsibilities through talk; as it is they always find us talking too much. I think if we act, they will not say we are acting too much, because action makes changes and it shows the seriousness of our living conditions. It is not a talking point.

The *University of Nairobi Library Magazine* not only presented an opportunity for the voice of working mothers be heard, but also set a clear social perspectives in which libraries need to find an appropriate role for themselves in the given social and political realities, the understanding of which is the starting point for progressive librarianship.

The second issue of the *University of Nairobi Library Magazine* continued addressing class and equality issues by examining how libraries can play a part in supporting rural and urban working people. The fourth issue concretised the contradictions between the lives of peasant women and that of urban, Western-educated librarians, for example in the article, "Libraries and rural development".

The issue of class is closely related to that of neutrality. The progressive library movement in Kenya also related these two issues to the relevance of the library service.

Key issues

A number of concerns emerge from the experiences recorded above. These can be summarised under a few topics, below:

The professional is political

The driving force behind the progressive library movement in Kenya was set out in the Draft Minimum Programme of the December Twelve

Movement. Their views, shared by the Library Cell members, can be summarised in brief extracts from their underground publication, *InDependent Kenya*:

... scientific socialism ... cannot be reduced to a set of bureaucratic declarations imposed on the people. It cannot simply be "decreed". Rather, this most progressive of social systems must emerge from a long revolutionary process and fierce class struggle, culminating in the overthrow of the entire capitalist system of production and social relations. As the histories of USSR and China demonstrate, during the transition to socialism intense class struggle continues, and there is a constant danger of regression to brutal statist domination. That danger is lessened if certain preconditions for the attainment of socialism have already been realised by the society at large. These preconditions include a high level of economic productivity and politically-conscious people led by a politically-uncompromising party which is prepared to wage revolutionary civil war to uproot the old order when the people are ready for it. Neither of these conditions is present in Kenya today (Cheche Kenya, 1982).

One of the key aims of the Library Cell was to make people "politically-conscious". For this they used all the communication channels open to them, such as writing of books and articles, producing and distributing underground newspapers and pamphlets and the collection and dissemination of information in all forms.

Progressive librarianship and organisation

If progressive librarianship is to be effective, it is necessary for there to be an organisational framework which it can use as a forum of ideas at one level, and as an agency for implementation of new ideas, for experimentation and for practical guidance of activists and supporters at another level. Progressive librarianship needs an organised group of activists, however small, to generate ideas and to put them into practice.

Progressive African Library and Information Activists (PALIAct) and Information for Social Change (ISC) are examples of progressive

librarianship as “ideas forum”. They have no supporting organisations or mechanisms whereby activists can put their ideas into practice. However, supporters of such forums can have a journal or can organise meetings which participants can take to their own work places for implementation. Thus Information for Social Change runs its own website and has the journal *Information for Social Change* which was published in paper form for a while, later to be only as an on-line journal. Similarly, PALIAct, when first started, had its print journal, *Information Equality, Africa*. The latter was set up and published under the auspices of the London Metropolitan University with funds from the Quality Leaders Project but this has since ceased. However, it was not meant to be a long-term organisation, only to generate ideas for African librarians, which it did in Kenya and later in Zimbabwe where it is still active.

The other type of organisation backing progressive librarianship is ones within established organisation. These are more stable and long lasting. They require organisations which can sustain ideas and some form of action over a longer period. Thus London Boroughs of Hackney and Merton provided such an organisational backing for some of the projects discussed later in the book. Later, the Quality Leaders Project (QLP) was supported organisationally by the London Metropolitan University and although it did not run a library service as such, it developed through curriculum development for training librarians at the University. To this aspect was added local authority organisational support for projects like the QLP (Youth) where a number of local libraries provided scope for implementing its ideas. It too published a number of newsletters and a journal, *QLP News*.

Information relevance

Among the earliest concerns for progressive library movement in Kenya was that of the relevance of the information collected, stored and disseminated by libraries. The question of relevance continues to be important to this day. The earliest reference to this was in 1980 when the issue of relevance was raised:

We should remember that there is no abstract, fixed group of people who are library users, and who need one constant

unchanging type of information. A library operates in a social context and reflects the ever changing contradictions of the society of its users. Thus library users as well as the information they need are constantly changing, both historically from one time to another as well as geographically, from place to place in one country and from one country to another.

Thus the question of relevant information should be seen in this dynamic context. The information needs are dependent upon the division of labour within a society and the needs of a worker are different from those of the bourgeoisie. "Relevance" of information should be related with the lives and needs of the nationalities Kenya and not to the needs of say, England. Information as well as the institutions developed to organise the information (libraries) are class-based and a librarian should be conscious of who they are serving; the bourgeoisie, for example, need different information from what the workers and peasants need (Durrani, 1980).

The editorial identified three aspects of a relevant library service:

1. The *content* of the information communicated.
2. The *medium* in which the information is communicated.
3. The *language* in which the information is communicated.

It identified an important aspect of library service in order to be relevant: "When considering the content of information and knowledge which libraries collect, store, disseminate and produce, concrete investigations have to find out what are the struggles of the workers and peasants for only then can a relevant information service be provided for them.

The issue of relevance has then been taken up in all activities in Kenya as well as in England.

Professionalism

The question of what is professionalism in the information field was a controversial one, provoking much debate and discussion. The issue was not whether the information field needed its own tools and standards and ethics, but what were these aimed to achieve. To that extent, the debate on "professionalism" was given an incorrect name, as the debate was not about whether there should be professionalism in libraries or not, but on what "professionalism" meant.

The debate developed around whether the professional body, the Kenya Library Association (KLA), was a "professional" association or not. The constitution of KLA was amended in 1981 so that it became "professional". KLA itself saw this as "transformation of KLA from being a cluster of workers ... into an organized structured and systemised association" and as the "creation of order out of chaos" (KELIAS News no. 2, 1981, p.1). In contrast "48 irate Kenyan librarians" issued a memorandum of protest against the new constitution proposals, saying that "KLA would become elitist and foreign-dominated if the proposals went ahead" (Memorandum dated 09-07-1979, quoted in *Zambia Library Association Newsletter*, II,1, Feb 1980, p.10).

At issue was whether Kenya needed a new model of librarianship and its related association or would it be sufficient or appropriate to adopt models from other countries. There are a number of issues involved as explained in *Upashanaji*:

There is a need to define very clearly what role we see the Association [KLA] playing in our society. In a society where over 80% of adult population cannot read and write and where a majority of population lives in rural areas, where abject poverty exists side by side with extremes of wealth, it will not do to model our library association on British or American library association models. Those who advocated the adaption of the new constitution at the AGM on the grounds that "other countries have these types of constitution so we must have it also" need to be made aware of the particular conditions of Kenya which are different from those in other countries both qualitatively and quantitatively ... we cannot define our role without understanding the social and economic context in which we live ...

Too often we dismiss the "junior librarian" as non-professional and fail to learn anything from her/his vast experience. Out of a population of about 15 million and hundreds of libraries, we consider only a handful – about 90 or so – as professional librarians, because they meet some mysterious qualifications recognised by "international librarianship". The rest of hundreds of library assistants with or without certificates are considered as unworthy of recognition as librarians, though they may spend their whole lives working in libraries. The result of this elitist way of looking at the profession is that the profession has been weakened and deprived of its lifeblood which can only be provided by the two-way exchange of ideas between the large number of librarians throughout the country and the Association. (*Upashanaji*, No.1, pp. 16-18, 1981).

An editorial in *the Kenya Library Association Newsletter* explained the concerns that some KLA members had about turning "professional". The forty eight members [who opposed the move to turn "professional"] presented a Memorandum at the Special General Meeting of KLA on 14 July, 1979. The meeting opposed the move to turn "professional" by 22 votes to 14. The Editorial explains a possible reason for this opposition:

Over the last year or so, there have been moves in different professions in Kenya to turn "professional". Among these are accountants, publishers, architects, land surveyors, lawyers. The most outstanding example is that of accounts. After the professional turned "professional" through an Act of Parliament, thousands of Kenyans lost their jobs overnight because they were condemned as "non-professional". Some of the accountants had been practicing for over 20 years. (*KLA Newsletter* no. 4/5 (Nov. 1979/July 1980, p.8).

But the Association did turn professional in the end. While the intention to become professional was probably positive, those opposed to it were interested in having "an open and democratic discussion" on the issue (*KLA Newsletter* no. 4/5 (Nov. 1979/July 1980).

Although those trying to get a new definition of “professionalism” in the KLA failed when the new constitution was adopted, the struggle to form a professional body that served the interest of Kenyan people as well as those working in libraries continued. Its other manifestation was in the proposal to form the Association of Agricultural Information Workers in Kenya, whose draft constitution was agreed by its interim committee. Unfortunately, the move to formalise the Association was delayed by the transfer of one of those behind the Association to another library.

Food, politics and information

A major concern for most Kenyans, during and after the colonial period, has been around land and food. Indeed the Kenyan liberation movement gave its fighting arm the name of “Kenya Land and Freedom Army”. The concentration of the most productive land in the hands of colonial settlers and African elite around the political movement represented by KANU, intensified the struggle for food, not only among the land-deprived peasantry but urban workers and jobless people as well.

If libraries take on board seriously the concerns of the people they claim to serve, then the people’s concerns would also be libraries’ concerns which would inform the vision and aims of libraries. But conservative librarianship is guided by its own concerns for preserving the status quo and people’s needs take a back seat.

The December Twelve Movement (DTM) took up this issue as a central issue for the Movement as it affected lives of millions. Its underground newspaper *Pambana* examined the “politics of food” in 1982:

For many years now, in newspapers and radio, we have been fed with government propaganda and that of World Bank or other foreign ‘experts’ that food shortages are a normal state of affairs in our country. They say that there is not sufficient arable land in Kenya. They tell us that our population is too high and is rapidly increasing and therefore not everyone can be fed. They tell us that we do not have enough Kenyan expertise. They tell us that capitalist agricultural production is the only type of agriculture possible. These are brazen

lies spread by imperialists and their agents so that they can continue exploiting our country. The production process and the distribution of wealth is done in a way which enables the imperialists to make high profits. For a capitalist, maximising profits is the overriding concern. The aim is to invest as little as possible and with as little risk for the highest possible returns. A capitalist even makes profits from our misery. When the capitalist is a foreigner as is the case in our country, this means the continuous drainage of our wealth to foreign countries, thus making our country poorer and poorer as theirs become richer and richer.

We must therefore know and understand that there are other systems of agricultural production which would enable us to produce more food, sufficient for everyone and even have a surplus. There is no doubt this is possible. It has happened in other countries which have dared to throw out imperialists and have afterwards adopted a system of agricultural production that puts people's basic food requirements first.

While the official position of the conservative library profession was that it was "neutral" and thus did not involve itself with the political implications of land distribution or food availability, the progressive librarianship movement held that these were key social issues and that information professionals needed to actively provide relevant information on these issues.

Ideology, politics and progressive librarianship

Progressive librarianship, as developed in Kenya, requires a passion for people and a commitment to equality and justice. It requires an activist approach, which can sometimes be personally dangerous to the activists. Whereas many conservative librarians perform their job as a way of earning a living, for progressive librarians another aspect is also important. Their passion is driven by an idea or an ideology which goes beyond their day-to-day jobs. It is a part of life, a world outlook that pervades all aspects of their lives. Such was the case for

the progressive librarians in Kenya. They were moved to action not by dreams of power or recognition, but as a way of responding to a vision of a society based on principles of equality and justice for all people. The driving force for progressive information activists and for political activists is very often the same. Many political activists become information activists to further their cause – and vice versa. This aspect is captured in a poem by the author to mark the achievements of Karimi Nduthu, whose activism encompassed both these aspects and for which he was murdered by the regime, as was Pio Gama Pinto in an earlier period. Creative works are yet another activity that many progressive librarians turn to not only to express their views on social and political reality, but also as a means of communication. As John Steinbeck, in his introduction to *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard Hit People* says:

The songs of the working people have always been their sharpest statement and the one statement which cannot be destroyed. . . . You can learn more about people by listening to their songs than in any other way, for into the songs go all the hopes and hurts, the angers, fears, the wants and aspirations." [Quoted in Coles, 2012].

This particular poem on Karimi Nduthi is important because it tries to capture the link between political and library and information work for activists. It is indeed ironic that among Nduthu's material seized or destroyed by those who assassinated him were copies of the Vita Book publication, *Kimaathi, Mau Mau's First Prime Minister of Kenya* which was in circulation underground. At the same time, the "name being unknown to history" is often the reality of many progressive librarians:

Song to the unsung³⁷

Your name may be unknown to history
 Your deeds unsung in official histories.
 But without your contribution
 There is no song to sing.

What if history is silent about you?
 What if they don't record your labour?
 You are etched forever
 in people's minds.

The struggle for survival
 Will survive for ever
 distributing underground literature
 writing latest people's news
 collecting worker's views
 discussing solutions under candlelight
 organising secret cells
 learning lessons in books and deeds

Unsung, unrecorded, unknown but to a few
 You struggle on
 Seeking neither wealth nor personal glory.
 Your work outlives the wealth of fat bags.

There is no victory without you
 You are the masses.
 Masses never die
 Fat bags do.

With a single blow to your head
 They hoped to end your work.
 From every drop of your blood
 Sprouts a thousand arms.

The unsung
 sing the last song.

³⁷ The poem, written on September 12, 1998, was published in *Karimi Nduthu; a life in the struggle* (1998) Vita Books/Mau Mau Research Centre: London; New York. p.15.

The British experience

The historical period dealt with in this book has seen Britain in a transition from a relatively “big” international power to one that is gradually slipping in economic, and hence political, global sphere. The decline of the British Empire following the Second World War had an important impact on the social, economic and political life of the country. As the USA took over the leadership of the Western countries in the post-war years, Britain began a decline. This was further speeded up by the rise of the BRIC countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China – in the last 20 years or so. These changes affected every aspect of life and were the unseen background to the political and economic struggles in the society. While the oil in Scotland provided a cushion from further economic decline, the profits from these were syphoned off by corporations or used in dubious ways by the governments. One way that the right-wing Government under Margaret Thatcher tried to come to terms with the declining economy was to appease corporate and finance capital by following a neo-liberal path of wholesale privatisation of state assets and a drastic process of deregulation, something which the Labour Government continued and which the present Conservative-led government is accelerating. Needless to say, this accommodation with capital increased the appetite of finance capital for even more avenues for profit and capital accumulation, resulting in further impoverishment of the majority of working people whose resistance to these neo-liberal policies also intensified.

In order to render resistance of the people ineffective, the corporate-backed government launched systematic attacks on civil and political rights. There was an increasing militarisation of policing, using tactics initially used in Ireland against IRA and in foreign wars. Overall, there has been a gradual decline of democratic rights. Jowit (2012) summarises the Democratic Audit (2012) report:

A study into the state of democracy in Britain over the last decade warns it is in “long-term terminal decline” as the power of corporations keeps growing, politicians become less representative of their constituencies and disillusioned citizens stop voting or even discussing current affairs.

A brief look at the state of libraries in Britain in 2012 can provide a context to the discussion on the role of libraries. Even as discussion on the role of libraries is taking place, many libraries are closing under the political agenda of the current British Government. Flood (2012) describes the situation:

The rate of library closures has increased, reveals the annual report from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy: 146 branches closed between 2010 and 2011, with the number stepping up to 201 this year. The UK now has 4,265 libraries, compared with 4,612 two years ago, and the number of closures is likely to grow. Campaigners in Newcastle are currently fighting plans to close 10 out of the city's 18 libraries.

Librarian numbers have fallen in line with branch closures, claimed the CIPFA survey on Monday, down 8% in the year to March 2012 compared with a 4.3% fall the previous year, while the number of volunteers working in libraries continues to rise – up by 8.9% this year – as councils hand over responsibilities for local branches to residents.

Visits to libraries across the UK have also dropped, down 2.4% to 306.6m and down 6.7% compared with five years ago, when there were 328.5m visits. Adults are borrowing less fiction – down 5.4% – and less non-fiction – down

7.3% – with the only growth seen in borrowing of children's fiction, up 0.3%.

This is the background to the various activities of the progressive librarianship movement recorded in this book. Indeed, the titles of publications and groups that were active in this period reflect social tensions and the increasing need for a need for change: *Information for Social Change*³⁸; *Race and Class*³⁹; *Information, Society and Justice*⁴⁰. At the same time, they used the “establishment” forms of management-speak, but altered the content of their programmes to reflect the need to empower the people with skills and experience relevant to their struggle in a capitalist system, for example the Quality Leaders Project (Youth) which sought to empower the marginalised youth while charting a new direction for public library service.

That the early work recorded here focused on the issue of racism is not accidental. Capitalism uses race as a “divide-and-rule” tactic to break up the unity of working classes and instead provide a false sense of solidarity based not on economic factors, but on ethnicity and race. Thus race equality is, in effect, an aspect of resistance to the capitalist system with its built-in divisive tendencies. As Wallerstein (2011) says:

Historical capitalism developed an ideological framework of oppressive humiliation which had never previously existed, and which today we called sexism and racism ... sexism was the relegation of women to the realm of non-productive labour, doubly humiliating in that the actual labour required of them was if anything intensified ...

³⁸ See: <http://libr.org/isc/>

³⁹ “Race and Class is a network of individuals and associated groups made of a number of progressive individuals and autonomous groups, each with its own specific identity, but work jointly on many fronts. They come from various professional backgrounds and include librarians, information workers, book shops, housing associations, academicians, information students, activist organisations, among others. R&C is an activist organisation which seeks to address oppression based on race and class in all fields. R&C works closely with a number of groups” – *Diversity: Newsletter of the Diversity Council*. Issue No. 1. June 2001. Available at: http://www.seapn.org.uk/content_files/files/diversitynewsletterjune01.pdf [Accessed: 30-10-12].

⁴⁰ See: www.londonmet.ac.uk/isj

Racism was not hatred or oppression of a stranger, of someone outside the historical system. Quite the contrary, racism was the stratification of the work-force inside the historical system, whose object was to keep the oppressed groups inside the system, not expel them. It did this by defining work with the lowest remuneration as remuneration for the lowest-quality work ... the structuring of sexism and racism could not and cannot be dismantled without dismantling the entire historical system which created them and which has been maintained in critical ways by their operation.

It is interesting to note that the activities of progressive librarianship recorded in this section, while in many cases relating only to anti-racism struggle, also take on board other aspects of equality at the same time. This is a reflection of the fact that race, gender and other struggles are different aspects of the overall struggle for equality. While these activities were not openly called anti-capitalist, in essence they were against the system created under capitalism. In this sense, class struggle was another aspect that was present in the struggle for equality, not only in Britain but in Kenya as well.

Before we look at the progressive librarianship initiatives in Britain, it is instructive to understand the reality of public libraries in Britain. A useful starting point is the research *Open to All?* (2000)⁴¹. Although written over a decade ago, its conclusions remain valid, and to the extent that they have not been addressed, remain relevant today, perhaps even more so in the face of the cuts brought about by the present British Government since 2010 and the withdrawal of requirements of library standards and equality impact assessments.

Open to All? (2000) poses a fundamental question about public library service in Britain: Is it open to all? The research provides an overview of public library service:

⁴¹ *Open to All?* was a "research project, 'Public Library Policy and Social Exclusion', based at Leeds Metropolitan University and conducted in partnership with the London Borough of Merton (Libraries), Sheffield Libraries, Archives and Information Services". The Research team consisted of Dave Muddiman, Shiraz Durrani, Martin Dutch, Rebecca Linley, John Pateman, John Vincent. *Open to All?* (2000) Vol. 1.

Public libraries are, at present, only superficially open to all. They provide mainly passive “access” to materials and resources and they have service priorities and resourcing strategies which work in favour of existing library users rather than excluded or disadvantaged communities or groups. An ICT led “modernisation” of the library service is doing little to change this pattern: our research concludes that this will simply replicate existing inequities of use in an “information age”.

The conclusion of *Open to All?* points to the need for a radical change in public libraries:

Although we are convinced that public library has the *potential* to play a key role in tackling social exclusion, we conclude that to *make a real difference* it will need not only to modernise its technical base, but to transform its fundamental purposes, policies and priorities. Provision of “access” to a mainly passive public library service is not, we believe, a strategy that will make a real impact on the social exclusion in the contemporary UK. To make such an impact, we conclude that the public library will need to become a far more proactive and interventionist public institution, with a commitment to equality, education and social justice at its core. Only then, it seems to us, will marginalised and excluded communities be returned to the mainstream of the library world.

Only then will public libraries be truly open to all.

That the report has not been taken seriously by legislators, local authorities or the professional body itself is an indication of the lack of commitment to equality and shows a lack of desire to make libraries relevant to the people on the part of conservative librarianship. It indicates the control over public library policy by the conservative establishment and conservative librarianship. It is then left to the progressive librarians to attempt to make radical changes to the ethos of public librarianship. The policy and practices recorded below are a record of some such attempts.

But the issues around equality and exclusion raised by *Open to All?* are not marginal to the library: they are at the very centre of British society. Democratic Audit (2012) compares Britain with other countries on this aspect:

When we compare the UK to its more direct peers, the other established democracies which are members of the OECD and the EU, its record in promoting economic and social inclusion makes for much less comfortable reading. ... we have shown how the UK tends to rank poorly on measures such as: income inequality; the incidence of low pay; the gender pay gap; the value of social benefits; the affordability of child care; and levels of child poverty. On all of these measures, and others, the UK tends to perform worse than the EU-15 average and the gap between the UK and the Nordic countries is especially acute.

Equality is perhaps the central issue that libraries, among other social institutions, should address as an urgent matter. But conservative librarianship is not inclined to do so and it remains for the progressive librarianship movement to take such issues on board.

Public service ethos: stop privatisation!

An important area where the conservative and progressive librarianship differ is in the area of library policy. There is a lack of policy and performance framework in public libraries and decisions are often made by senior staff guided by their own ideological viewpoint, often disguised under “professional” and “neutrality” garbs. It is for this reason that the progressive librarianship practices taken up in this book all have a strong policy and performance framework. It is also for this reason that the teaching and learning programmes at the London Metropolitan University emphasised policies, in the Modules taught and in projects such as the Quality Leaders Project and the Library Skills Project. However, the lack of a policy and regulations approach in libraries is a reflection of a similar lack at a national level. The requirement for producing annual library plans went through various phases until it was removed, leaving no planning framework

in place. The Parliamentary Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport explains the history and advantages of having Annual Library Plans (ALPs) – but this has failed to change Government policy:

The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 requires library authorities to “provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof”. The Act also makes it a duty of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport “to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred on them as library authorities by or under this Act”. These requirements placed upon both local authorities and upon the Secretary of State have remained undefined, making more difficult the enforcement of the relevant provisions of the 1964 Act.

In recent years, the Government has taken some steps forward in seeking to give greater force to the requirements of the 1964 Act. Since 1998, all library authorities have been required to produce Annual Library Plans that include reviews of past performance and strategies and targets for the current and future years. The Annual Library Plans assist library authorities in focusing their resources. The DCMS monitors the quality of Annual Library Plans. Mr Alan Howarth said that if a local authority’s plan was considered inadequate the authority would be required to “think again and to come back to us with an improved plan” (Great Britain, 2000).

However, the Third Report of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport (Great Britain, 2005) raised concerns about the removal of the requirement for these annual plans:

The Department [of Culture Media, and Sport] said that the Annual Library Plans (ALPs) were introduced in 1998 against “the backdrop of the decline of some of England’s public library services” to encourage “better planning”. The DCMS stated that ALPs, having improved markedly over four years, were discontinued in 2002 having achieved their aim.

The wisdom of abandoning an improving product seems to us to be open to question.

We commend the Government for attempting to establish a national strategy for the provision of library services, and national standards for the quality and performance of those services, in accordance with its statutory responsibilities. We were, however, dismayed by the chopping and changing that has taken place in the process of trying to settle on a set of workable arrangements. We suspect that the overall policy of granting “freedoms and flexibilities” to local authorities may have been applied too liberally by DCMS in this area to the detriment of improvements in library services; not least the 50% of such services that remain persistently below standard.

Many library authorities had used the requirements of the ALPs and the need to provide a specified level of service as required by the Library Standards as a way of ensuring that their local authorities, which fund the libraries, provide adequate funding for these services. But the removal of these requirements left libraries with no tool to ensure an adequate level of service or staffing. Perhaps this was the reason that the requirements were removed, as the current cuts in public services demanded by the market-driven Government policy has meant the closure of many libraries or reduction of services and staffing. The field has once again been opened by the Government to advance its free market agenda. Yet the lack of regulation in public libraries is not an isolated case of misguided or misunderstood government programme. It is at the heart of a process pushed by the political elite in the interest of “neo-liberal economic and social policies” which benefit corporate interests. The effects of these policies are made clear by Democracy Audit (2012):

This chapter has also documented the declining significance of trade unions in the UK as well as evidence of growing corporate power, particularly as manifested in the ‘light-touch’ approach to financial services regulation and in the pressures for deregulation in areas such as health and safety in

the workplace. It is our view that the increasingly privileged position of corporate interests in the UK political process, alongside the relative weakness of British trade unions in comparison to their counterparts elsewhere, cannot be divorced from the UK's position as one of the most unequal societies in the OECD. Over the course of three decades, UK governments have counted among the leading exponents of neo-liberal economic and social policies, particularly with regard to the labour market.

These concerns should be at the very centre of debates on public libraries and their future since they affect the role and future of libraries in a fundamental way. Yet the conservative profession has kept aloof from any such debates, let alone taking action to ensure that libraries survive as a relevant and meaningful institution in this period of rapid deregulation and privatisation. The danger signs were also ignored when, in 2011, the Government abolished the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) which could have played an important role in representing interests of public libraries or at least provided a forum for libraries to come together to defend themselves. With the professional body, CILIP, already made toothless by its own conservative agenda, there is no organised library force that could nationally take up the challenge of defending library service. Some trade unions, particularly, UNISON, have taken up the library struggle seriously, but with the TU movement itself under attack, their focus on libraries becomes just one of the many fronts they are fighting on. The future is then open for a privatised future for libraries – or a diversion to extinction through the involvement of “volunteer community” initiatives which cannot provide or guarantee the required quality or quantity of public library services with appropriate professional input.

But the voices of resistance are rising – there is yet hope to save the situation. The hope comes not from the “professional” bodies or “leaders” of important libraries, but from the rank and file of librarians who are often kilometres ahead of their organisations and employers. The current (2013) dire situation in the public libraries remains outside of the scope of this book, but is heartening that with all the library closures and meaningless “assurances” from the Government for its future, there is a strong defence of public libraries from its committed

and loyal workers and communities. Such sentiments are expressed in a recent blog:

Public services, including libraries are under attack from 'austerity' cuts, commercialisation, de-professionalisation, privatisation and divestment and library staff are under pressure to conform and 'keep their heads down', something I've never been very good at! This is why more than ever I truly believe that library staff need to re-discover their public service 'ethos' but what do I mean by this? To me it means a commitment to advancing social equity, integrity, pride, listening to and involving the community in service provision, impartiality and specifically in relation to public libraries providing free access to information, knowledge and educational opportunities, in other words empowering communities to take control of their own lives. To me it's political as is everything! (Wylie, 2012)

A profession with such clear, articulate supporters who have a clear understanding of the political and social context of libraries in our times surely has a bright future.

*

The following section looks at three situations to assess how progressive librarianship addressed the weakness identified by *Open to All?* and which conservative librarianship has been unable or unwilling to address. The first two are based in two public library authorities; the third one is based in an academic institute where an attempt is made to address the teaching and learning experience of a new generation of professional librarians.

A basic concern for any public service should be to ensure equality in all aspects of service provision. If a public service, using public funds, discriminates against any section of the population, then it loses its right to be called a *public* service and becomes a service only for some. Such discrimination can be on the basis of race, gender, ability or class or many other forms – and often a combination

of these. It would not be acceptable if the National Health Service⁴² (NHS) provided service to some people only and discriminated against others on the basis of their class, gender, ethnicity or age. Yet such a situation exists in libraries and is regarded as “normal”. Conservative librarianship for generations has either ignored or attempted to hide the reality of a library service which in reality is a service for only some sections of the population. A real test of a people-orientated library service is to test its policies and practice on its commitment to equality. The main distinguishing feature of progressive librarianship when compared to the conservative one is that it places issues of equality as a key principle on which it develops service.

In the Kenyan case examined earlier, the starting point was a failure of the service to meet the needs of those marginalised by colonialism and then by an anti-people regime in league with corporate capitalism. In Britain, the starting point, as we shall see below, was an attempt to ensure equality on the basis of race, but also with the implicit and explicit understanding that there cannot be real equality unless all aspects on inequality are also addressed. In Hackney, this started on the basis of race; in Merton, developing an “equal”, needs-based service was the central plank of service development. At the London Metropolitan University, this search was taken to yet another level in its teaching and learning programme, and with projects such as the Quality Leaders Project, which sought equality on the basis of race as well as on age, with young people in focus. Thus equality was at the centre of all such progressive librarianship programmes.

Hackney Public Library

The 2001 population of the London Borough of Hackney was 207,246. With 26.4% of its population under 20, Hackney was ranked the second youngest borough, after Newham (29.5%), among inner London boroughs. The Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population in 2001 was 40.7% of the population with Black and Black British making up 24.7% and Asian or Asian British making up 8.7% of the total population.

⁴² It must, however, be admitted that under the programme of rapid privatisation of the NHS, such discrimination is likely to become the norm in health service as well. Rather than libraries learning from NHS, it seems that the process is in the opposite direction.

Hackney Household Survey estimated that around 100 languages are spoken in the borough. 66% of households stated that English was the only language they spoke at home; 22% said it was their main language and a further 12% said that they did not speak English at home. The most widely spoken languages were Turkish, Yiddish, French, Gujarati, Bengali and Yoruba. In 2006, a total of 76,200 (53.3%) people were in employment, which was lower than for London (67.8%) and England as a whole (72.5%). (London Borough of Hackney, 2012).

The Hackney Library Service had seven libraries, a number having been closed over the years. The progressive librarianship initiatives mentioned below did not encompass the entire library service as there were many organisational obstacles to achieving a Borough-wide change. The changes that did take place were at specific library sites and were undertaken on the basis of initiatives of staff in libraries working in a strong partnership with other Council staff and with local community members, with additional support from the progressive organisations outside the Borough. However, the difficulties that faced the service in bringing about any major change in the system as a whole reflect difficulties in organisational change, given the hold of conservative forces in libraries. This is confirmed by an official report in 2004, some sections of which are reproduced below in order to highlight the difficulties of changing a well-entrenched interest group in the conservative library service. The Report's conclusions reinforce the findings of the *Open to All?* research mentioned earlier.

The Report, London Borough of Hackney (2004), touches upon a number of issues which the progressive librarians in Hackney were addressing as early as 1987:

Views of users and non-users were similar, non-users wanted to see more radical changes in the way libraries operate. It was noted that 70% of the population are non-users. It is apparent that as well as meeting the needs of existing users, the service needs to attract a greater proportion of potentially new users ...

The findings of the review indicate that the library service is being provided because it is a statutory requirement.

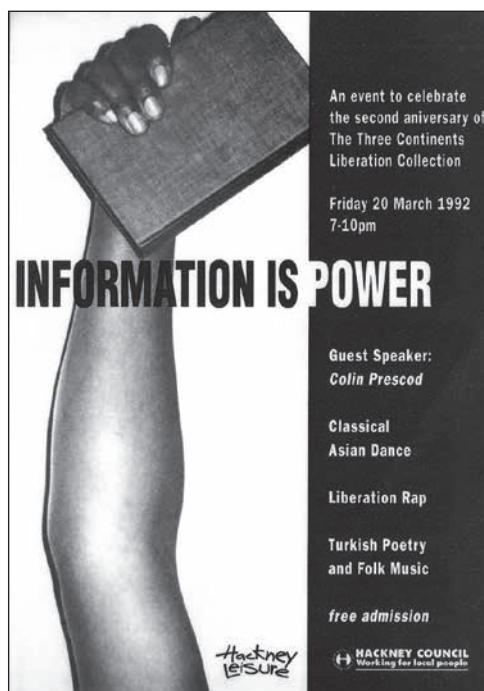
However, 70% of the population do not use the service. The service is not engaging or meeting the needs of a large section of residents ...

There does not appear to be a clear rationale for the development of the service, where it is going and how it contributes to meet the Council's wider objectives. A development strategy would enable the Council to appraise options and make strategically informed decisions about the future development of the library service. It would clearly define the role of the service within the new Area Development Plans rather than the apparent 'spasmodic' attempt to seize whatever opportunity appears to present itself ...

The review group agreed that Hackney Library Service needs to redefine its role and reposition itself at the centre of communities, serving the needs of the neighbourhoods where each of the libraries are located; recognising that libraries can be a key driver in multi partnership initiatives to regenerate local communities.

Thus while the progressive activities mentioned below provided a way out of library stagnation and indicated that meaningful change was necessary and possible, no lessons were learnt by the service as a whole. This was largely because of the vested interests of conservative librarianship, which saw these changes as personally and professionally threatening to their own narrow interests, and took the first opportunity to undo the changes made under the progressive agenda and which were popular with local communities and with many staff. This also indicates the uphill task that progressive librarianship faces in making long term changes in an environment where national and local politics is dominated by forces of conservatism and free market capitalism.

The search for relevance via Equal Opportunity Policy



28: Information is Power (TCLC anniversary event) 1992

Progressive librarianship activists made an attempt to develop a relevant library service in November 1987. This was a proposal on how one of the libraries in the London Borough of Hackney could be made more relevant to local communities. It was considered necessary to seek such relevance through the use of existing policies to ensure that the service did not get bogged down in a long process of formulating new policies. The existing policy used was the Hackney Council's Equal Opportunities Policy. The proposal, entitled *Implementation of the Equal Opportunity Policy at C.L.R. James Library* (Implementation Report) (Durrani, 1987), set out a vision of what a progressive library service should be doing. As such, it was an important document as a background for subsequent policies and practices covered in this book. The document emphasises an important aspect of the main concerns of the progressive library movement in England during this period: race.

As Durrani (2008b) explains, "In particular situations, one aspect may be more important than others. Thus, for example, in Hackney the issue of race became important and ... [activists] took on this as the key aspect. This did not mean that other aspects, such as gender or class, became less important". Another relevant aspect was class, which was always an important consideration, though not always so expressed in keeping with the sensibilities of the establishment at the relevant times. For the purpose of understanding the development of progressive librarianship, it is instructive to reproduce key points from the Implementation Report:

The Council's Equal Opportunity Policy was evolved to overcome certain social practices that have discriminated against sections of the society: Black and people of national minorities, women, lesbians and gay men, people with disabilities among others ...

This policy should be implemented in all libraries in Hackney. In this sense it has to apply at C.L.R. James as well. However it should be remembered that the Library was so named not merely as a formality. It was in response to the pressure from the various disadvantaged social groups who felt that the library services were not geared to their needs, both in terms of the external form and the content of the service. (Durrani, 1987).

The Report then highlights a number of social forces that had an impact on library services. The first one was an active involvement of people themselves in the development of a relevant library service. In the case of Hackney, members of local communities, mainly Black and ethnic minorities, occupied the offices of Head of libraries in early 1980s and demanded action in making libraries more relevant to their needs. It is interesting to note here that pressure for change came from people themselves. The second point made in the Implementation Report was that of social struggles and the need to address resistance to change within the service. The Report then went on:

The naming of the Library [to C.L.R. James Library] addressed the first – that dealing with external form – problem. The very name was to give an assurance to all the disadvantaged groups in the Borough that their needs were being seriously considered by the Library Services and by the Council. These initial signals to the people of Hackney that their needs are now being provided for has, in essence, remained at a cosmetic level, at the level of form only as if it is sufficient merely to change the name of the library with no further need for change. For it is true that in reality C.L.R. James Library is no different from any other Library in the Borough, except in name.

The Implementation Report recognises that resistance to change often takes the form of changing the form, the outward appearance, of a service to ensure the continuation of the status quo, while retaining the essence of the old service. The Report goes on to make a suggestion on how the library service should go about deciding what services are needed by local communities:

... undertake investigations of the actual composition of the population in the area served by the library. These should investigate the locations and numbers of people of different nationalities, their geographical distribution, their age groups, and their division into various social and economic classes. From these investigations will emerge the particular information, social and cultural needs of the people which the Library can then attempt to solve.

It will be noted that the aspect of class is included in addressing the needs of the community. Thus while the aspect of race and ethnicity may appear to be primary concern in the Implementation Report, it is clear from a closer reading that other aspects of equality, particularly, class, were included in the concerns for a library service. The Report goes on to mention issues of languages and forms in which information is disseminated and communicated as other factors that should inform the delivery of a relevant library service:

An important way to make a library service attractive to the people is to promote the use of various languages spoken by the people [...] C.L.R. James Library will have to take steps in promoting these non-English languages in different ways, ranging from actively promoting the employment of people speaking these languages; to acquiring more books, records, films etc. in these languages. It is when people see the library's commitment in practice in these areas that they will have a new respect for its services.

It will be seen that many of the points mentioned above reflect the ideas and practices of the Library Cell in Kenya whose experience were seen earlier. Yet another aspect that the Implementation Report examined relates not only to the practice in Kenya, but looking ahead to the development of the Three Continents Liberation Collection (TCLC) at the C.L.R. James Library:

The Library should be active in another area as well: its collection of Third World material (books, periodicals and newspapers, records and tapes, films) which would reflect the lives of the people. One failure of our libraries has been the over-importance given to European-orientated material. Such new collections would go a long way in breaking the walls that make libraries inaccessible to working people. Similarly, particular attention should be paid at C.L.R. James Library to children's material from around the world. It should have a good collection of oral and written children's material.

The Implementation Report (Durrani, 1987) was clear, however, that the mere provision of such material would not, in itself, ensure that people were aware of it and start seeing the library as a relevant one which meets their needs. It thus sees the library playing "an active role in organising cultural events and lectures to support the important cultural events celebrated by the people". Again, this is something that took place under the TCLC.

The Report finally takes up the issue of having an appropriate leadership and the role of committed staff – areas which have been at the centre of concerns for progressive librarianship:

Lack of funds should not be used to prevent the implementation of the Equal Opportunities Policy as outlined above. The most important requirement is active leadership in the library, committed to implementing the Policy. Such active leadership will not only motivate staff; it will also begin a programme of formulating short – and long-term – plans, which if done correctly, can attract financial support from resources such as Central Government, GLC [Greater London Council, the elected administrative body for Greater London from 1965 to 1986] residual bodies and Embassies and High Commissions.

Interestingly, the Report mentions the provision of a “community based socialist library service”. The use of the term, “socialist library service” was in the air at that time in Hackney, and the link of this with the concept of progressive librarianship needs to be seen more clearly. In the Kenyan context mentioned earlier, it had not been possible to use terms like “socialist”, as the repressive governments had given up on the earlier visions of the liberation forces for a fair, socialist society. Even the later use of the rather meaningless term developed to counter the rapid rise of socialist thought – “African socialism” – promoted by the Western-backed Tom Mboya was no longer promoted as the word “socialism” itself had been relegated to a “non-desirable” category.

In Britain, while the term was used more often and in many cases contrasted with the free market-oriented approach of the Thatcher-led Conservative government, the reality was that it was not possible, given the political situation at the time, to see any socialist initiatives come to fruition. It is also an important fact of the mainstream, conservative librarianship in Britain that it tends to endorse – or at least keeps quiet about – all Government policies or initiatives, however damaging to the free flow of information, learning, knowledge and entertainment and however “unequal” their impact on the people. The “professional” ethos is not to get involved in “politics” and challenging harmful legislation actively is considered as being “political” – and “librarians don’t do politics”.

But the “we do not do politics” attitude is not confined to librarians alone. This attitude pervades the entire public service which takes up enthusiastically and without much critical questioning

every fad that comes from a corporate-inspired government, however damaging it may be to the ethos of public service. Such government initiatives are often related to the relentless drive towards marketisation of public service and are linked to the movement for “free capital” to maximise private profit at the expense of social concerns such as equality and fairness. In Britain, Walker (2012) talks of the public sector succumbing to neophilia – a condition defined as “fixation with the new, the fashionable, the trendy” – and describes its consequences:

The public sector has sucked in commissioning, localism and devolution as it has sucked up to consultants over performance related pay, choice and transformation. These emperors lack clothes. Propositions are just theories of hunches for which the evidence base is often perilously thin.

Walker goes on to explain the damage done by this attitude among public service managers:

Neophilia appears to rot the brain. The biggest capitulation has been to the dogma of perfectly functioning markets – an ideal foisted on the public sector as a norm.

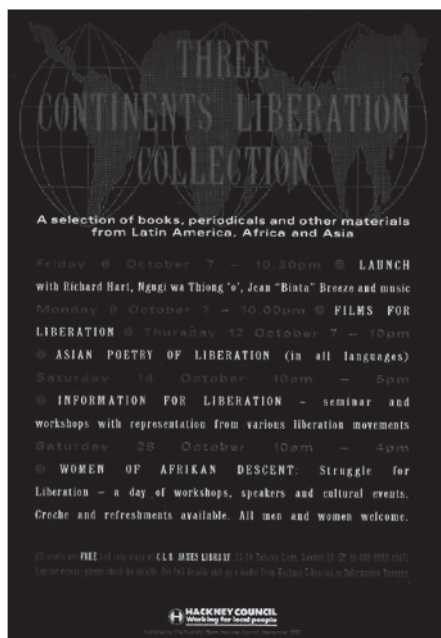
This mindless following of the “dogma of perfectly functioning markets” in the library sector has resulted in a sector devoid of creativity and has led to the general assumption that public library sector is “sick” and needs increasing doses of privatisation and consultants from the business sector to ensure survival. While innovation for appropriate reasons and in appropriate direction needs to be welcome, it is important to balance this with Walker’s advice that “old ideas are often as good as new”. The reality is that the governments use reorganisation, restructuring and the push for “innovation” as a way of disguising the reality of the marketisation agenda behind such attacks on public service.

One defence against the use of “experts” and “consultants” to bring about innovation and against meaningless restructurings was identified in the Implementation Report (Durrani, 1987) which concluded with a challenge:

The most important assets in doing this work ("build a service that can look towards the needs of the 1990s") is already available in the committed rank and file library workers. It remains to be seen if this potential can be turned into reality by those in leadership positions in the library.

An important outcome of the Implementation Report was the development of the Three Continent Liberation Collection which provided important lessons on the possibilities as well as challenges in developing a progressive library service.

The struggle for the Three Continents Liberation Collection



29: TCLC launch publicity leaflet (1989)

The setting up of the Three Continents Liberation Collection (TCLC) at the C.L.R. James Library in Hackney was an attempt to implement ideas of progressive librarianship, many based on the author's experience in Kenya, within a local authority setting in London.

It represented a struggle of progressive people in local authority and local communities with the established power structures in the Council and in the library service itself. This struggle provides many lessons for progressive library activists as to what ideas and action work, how and with what success.

The TCLC was the natural follow-up of the ideas and issues raised in the Report, *"Implementation of the Equal Opportunity Policy at C.L.R. James Library"* (Durrani, 1987). But it was not simply a straightforward implementation. Various struggles had to be waged before the TCLC came to fruition. Many of the original ideas were refined and strengthened in the struggle; others had to be modified in the face of fierce opposition from the conservative forces in the library service.

The launch

The Three Continents Liberation Collection was launched on 6th October 1989, with a week-long series of activities. The main launch event included a welcome by the Chair of the Council's Community Services Committee followed by an overview of the Collection, a keynote address by Richard Hart, the author of *Slaves who Abolished Slavery: Blacks in rebellion*. Author Ngugi wa Thiong'o was expected to talk about "cultural liberation" but flight delays from USA prevented him coming in time for the launch. There was also a cultural programme with poetry by Jean "Binta" Breeze, and music from Brazil by Paulo de Oliveira. Throughout the month of October, also 'Black History Month', there was an exhibition at the library on "The Life and Times of C.L.R. James". Other events for the launch week indicate the broad scope of the work that the TCLC expected to take up over the years. The Collection itself included a large number of books reflecting the struggles in the Three Continents – Africa, Asia, Latin America – as well as UK-Europe as the "home" base of the TCLC. The evening of 9 October saw a programme of films and discussion on the theme "films for liberation", an indication that for the TCLC, the process of a generation and a people talking to one another involved more than the printed word. The launch programme explained the significance of this:

The documentation of the liberation struggle is best done through an audio-visual medium such as films. The visual image is more powerful in conveying the reality of a struggle than the printed word alone.

The film show and discussions included Palestine and African films. Also shown was *Time and Judgement* which provided:

... an overview of the African liberation movement that spans a period of 400 hundred years. The film narrates the tribulations and successes of people of African descent in and out of Africa with a special focus on the struggles of the last century.⁴³

"Asian poetry of liberation" was the theme of the programme on 12th October and included readings of poetry in Gujarati, Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, Bengali and English by twelve London-based poets reading their own and others' works.

The focus then turned to a day-long seminar on "information for liberation" on 14 October. Participants included representatives of political and liberation movements, including ANC, Caribbean Labour Solidarity, Chile Cultural Centre, Hackney African Association, Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, UMOJA (Kenya), Workers Party of Jamaica as well as members of the public. Following an initial session of exchange of ideas and experiences on the theme "The struggle: an information exchange", the group then split into two Workshops, one focussing on "information needs of the liberation struggle" and the other on "case studies of liberation information services".

The evening ended with reports from the Workshops with final recommendations for the future development of the TCLC. There were "footsteps to liberation" activities on the Hackney Library's promotional 'BookBus' throughout the day for younger members of the community.

The Saturday afternoon event of 28 October took up yet another concern of the TCLC, with presentations and workshops on the theme "women of African descent: struggle for liberation". A crèche and 'BookBus' events were provided to enable women with childcare

⁴³ Taken from film publicity. See: <http://www.africanfilm.com/timejudge.htm> [Accessed: 30-10-12]

responsibilities to attend. The programme ended with the 1981 film show "You have struck a rock", which was "homage to the immense contributions black South African women made to the anti-apartheid movement. [The] title comes from a proverb: "When you have touched a woman, you have struck a rock." The TCLC launch programme ended the same evening with a cultural event, with a number of prominent local artists.

Saturday October 28th, 1989

**WOMEN OF AFRICAN DESCENT:
STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION.**

2.00 pm - 10.00 pm.

2.00 pm Registration and Refreshments.
2.15 pm Introduction.
An Overview of Workshops.
Workshop:
I. Women of African Descent:
An Historical Overview.
Cheryl Monteth.
II. Strategies to Effect Change:
Moving Towards the 21st
Century.
Jessica Hensley.
Report back from the Workshops.
Creche available during seminar.
5.00 pm Film: You Have Struck
A Rock.
7.10pm **CULTURAL EVENT**

Lorena Chant
Lorna Miller
Sister D (Barrett)
Cast from "Egagomfita".
And other female artistes.

Bookbus activity:
Footsteps to Liberation
Music Workshops.
Refreshments available.





Buses 149, 46, 228, 67, 243, 30, 38, 277.
Train Dalston Kingsland.

All events are FREE and take place at:
C.L.E. James Library,
24-30 Dalston Lane,
London E2. Tel. 965 8262.
Limited access, check with library.

THREE
CONTINENTS
LIBERATION
COLLECTION

PROGRAMME



Friday October 6th, 1989 LAUNCH 7.00 pm Refreshments and Viewing the Collection. 7.30 pm Message from the Mayor. Overview of The Collection. Shiraz Durrani. Chair of Community Services. Hajra Khete. Poetry. Jean "Bista" Breeze. The Struggle for Liberation. Richard Hart. Cultural Liberation. Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Appreciation. Dan Thoa. Music from Brazil. Paulo de Oliveira. Vote of Thanks. John Spencer. 'Life and Times of C.L.E. James' An Exhibition (Throughout October) 	Monday October 9th, 1989 FILMS FOR LIBERATION, plus Discussion. 7.00 - 10.00 pm. The documentation of the liberation struggle is best done through an audio-visual medium such as films. The visual image is more power- ful in conveying the reality of a struggle than the printed word alone. Provisional Programme: Time and Judgement (CEDDO) A VLO film Discussion Thursday October 12th, 1989  ASIAN POETRY OF LIBERATION. 6.30 - 10.00 pm Readings in Gujarati, Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, Bengali and English. WITH Chaman Lal Chaman Ms Bharti Vora Ms Shweta Pankaj Rahab Layaipuri Ms Nisha Shah Ms Santosh Toshan Dr Satyen Srivastava Dr Vidya Anand Ifkhar Anif Madan Pal Fushaj Vora Vijaykumar Arun	Saturday October 14th, 1989. Seminar INFORMATION FOR LIBERATION, 9.30 am - 5.00 pm. Participants will include representatives of political and liberation movements, including ANC, Caribbean Labour Solidarity, Chile Cultural Centre, Hackney Asian Association, Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, YMOJADUKI, Workers' Party of Jamaica as well as members of the public. 9.30 am Registration and Coffee. 10.00 am Introduction The Struggle: An information exchange. Workshops: I. Information Needs of the Liberation struggle - different levels and aspects. II. Case Studies of Liberation Information Services. Reports from Workshops. Recommendations. 5.00 pm Close. Bookbus activity: Footsteps to Liberation. 
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Following the launch, the TCLC received positive mention in local press. *Hackney Herald* carried the following item on 6 October 1989:

A new and unique collection of books highlighting struggles against oppression in Africa, Asia and Latin America was unveiled by Hackney Council at the C.L.R. James Library on 6 October.

Called "The Three Continents Liberation Collection", the book launch is a tribute to the outstanding Black writer and activist C.L.R. James who died earlier this year ... Much emphasis is being placed on the vital educational role of the Collection – with its in-depth material from around the world, and a "World of Languages" section including items in the various languages spoken in Hackney.

That the TCLC had reached fruition was an important achievement for progressive librarianship as well as for staff and communities in Hackney. But it was not without a struggle. Durrani (1993) provides a glimpse of the forces at play:

Around 1986, there developed within the library service a struggle between a euro-centric group of librarians who questioned the very need of having any black collections and undermined the Council's Equal Opportunity policies by refusing to buy material or provide services of interest to B&EM [Black and Ethnic Minority] communities. In contrast, a group of librarians who believed in providing a service that the community really needed came together to form a core group who decided, among other things, that the name of the C.L.R. James Library needed a proper content. That after all was what people had wanted rather than an empty gesture of a name-change.

Some middle and upper-level managers who opposed the concept of delivering a service which the community needed had built up a strong power block in the service which acted as a mafia to control resources, policies and services. But the success for those who wanted to establish this new service came from the unity of a broad

alliance of progressive library and Council staff joining hands with various local organisations which had always wanted initiatives such as the TCLC. They organised themselves into the TCLC Support Group in which the Hackney Black Workers Group played a critical role. They developed a carefully prepared strategy which included the creation of the TCLC. The plans had an almost immediate positive response from communities, not only in Hackney, but nationally. This included progressive individuals and institutions and publishers, as explained in its documentation:

It was the TCLC Support Group that worked out the idea of the Collection, prepared detailed plans and reports, undertook feasibility studies, consulted communities and came up with final plans for the TCLC. The Group by now included supporters from other Council Departments, academicians, organised community groups such as Hackney African Organisation, Hackney Asian Association, Hackney Women's Centre, various local Turkish organisations, Jenako Arts, Institute of Race Relations as well as independent bodies such as Oxfam, Amnesty International, Hackney Commission for Racial Equality, etc. Many institutes were so impressed by what the Collection had done and by what it represented that many valuable donations of complete runs of back periodicals were made. These included *Index on Censorship*, *Africa Events*, and publications from World Association for Christian Communication. Other donations have included publications from *Liberation*, *African Concord*, as well as signed copies of publications by the well-known historian, Richard Hart. (Durrani, 1993)

The significance and success of the TCLC was explained by Durrani (1993):

The TCLC is perhaps the only project in the library field in the country which has been initiated, planned, and implemented entirely by the grassroots staff in the library service with support from committed individuals from other Council Departments and the community. If ever there was

a "people's project" the TCLC is one, in the fullest sense. Those who were behind the project will bear witness that the biggest challenge was to convince Library's Senior Management about the viability and necessity of the project. Many petty technicalities were raised time and again and had to be struggled against before the project finally took off.

Users came from all over Hackney and included students from Hackney College, teachers, parents, Council employees, community members, and Hackney-based activists from around the three continents. Students from London colleges such as North London Polytechnic, Polytechnic of Central London, found an easily accessible source of information in the TCLC which they could not find anywhere else locally. Over the first few years visitors came from Germany, South Africa, and Tanzania. Important personalities who have visited the Collection include John La Rose, founder of the International Book Fair and Radical Black and Third World Books, and G. Pande, President of the United Artists' Association, India. Annual visits were made by library and information studies post graduate students from Thames Valley University as part of their curricula. Such visits became forums of discussion on issues such as liberation and the role of libraries in meeting needs of people. All were impressed by the Collection and the commitment, enthusiasm and vision of the staff at C.L.R. James Library and members of the Black Workers Group and the TCLC Support Group.

Besides its unique book collection, TCLC provided a wide range of activities with local and international flavour which helped to root it in local communities while increasing the usage of the library. Such activities were not superficial "celebrations of cultures" but provided information on various struggles locally and around the world. The aspect that attracted much support was the fact that the TCLC stood against all oppression and exploitation and took sides with those resisting inequalities. As is the case with politics and local services today, people are far ahead of their "leaders" in understanding what they need and how these can be achieved. It is the lack of real power that prevents them from developing policies and legislation that can meet their needs. All the talk of "democracy" in the West has not given people the power and the freedom to decide what they need.

The march of two million people against Britain's declaration of illegal war on Iraq did not prevent "their" Government from plunging the country into this war adventure. Similarly, when given the real power to decide on the type of service they needed, people in Hackney equivocally chose to go for the TCLC model rather than the previous "one size fits all" branch library model at the C.L.R. James Library.

■ THREE CONTINENTS LIBERATION COLLECTION

To celebrate the first anniversary of the launch of the collection, C.L.R. James Library presents **UKOMBOZI - A celebration of African liberation through music.**

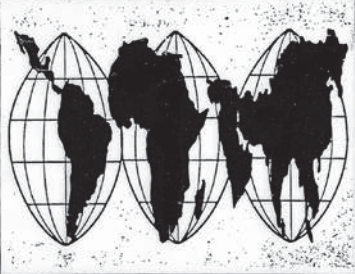
Saturday 1 December 1990

10am - 1pm Expressions of African Liberation
A seminar introduced by Yevone Brown, including a discussion on the property rights of African music, and musical activities for children.

1 - 2pm African Lunch

2 - 4pm African Liberation Awareness - workshops for children, plus storytelling, music workshop and the libraries' Bookbus.

7 - 9pm Sounds of Africa - An evening of African entertainment with Pitika Ntuli and Juwan. A dramatic performance illustrating the struggles of African liberation by the powerful use of music and poetry. Listen also to Jazira, a band playing exhilarating African rhythms.



For further information, contact Shiraz Durrani at C.L.R. James Library 24-30 Dalston Lane, Dalston, E8. ☎ 081 985 8262 x2571.

31: TCLC Anniversary event (1990)

The Three Continents Liberation Collection's organisation and policy provided opportunities to link different struggle with each other through the provision of books and information on these struggles, thus establishing its central information role in social struggles. The TCLC activities then provided opportunities for different struggles to come together, debate and discuss their successes and challenges. At the same time, it also provided a lesson on what and how progressive librarianship can become relevant to its communities, and indicated an area totally ignored by conservative librarianship. For example, the TCLC jointly organised the 1993 event, "From Hackney to Havana: breaking the information blockade" organised by the TCLC and the International Group of the Library Association (IGLA). The aim of the event was to express solidarity with the Cuban people's struggle for books and information. The event was covered in *Hackney Libraries News* no.11 December 1993.



32: Women and liberation (TCLC event) 1993

Other events included the celebration of children's activities with the local Turkish and Kurdish communities which resulted in a large number of members from these communities joining the libraries. These had not been persuaded before the TCLC initiative that libraries had relevance to their lives and struggles.

But it would be premature to celebrate the establishment of the TCLC, as the question of sustainability brought another level of difficulties. Progressive activists need to be aware of counter attacks by forces of conservatism. In Hackney, such forces used the next round of staff restructuring to marginalise the TCLC.

The TCLC Support Group saw the danger facing the newly established service in the face of hostile reaction from some senior managers and like-minded middle managers. The starting point for understanding the setting up of the Collection was the "Implementation Report" mentioned earlier. The next important milestone was another report, this time seeking Library Management approval for the "consolidation and development of TCLC in view of experiences gained over the two years of its existence and in view of the restructuring of the Library Service". This report was entitled the *Development of the Three Continents Liberation Collection at C. L. R. James Library* (the Development Report) (Durrani and Dunn, 1991).

AN EVENING OF DISCUSSION, INTERACTION AND CULTURE

Colin Prescod is editor of the BBC TV African Caribbean Unit. Productions in 1992 included the "Black on Europe" series and the "Homelands in Hollywood" documentary. From 1969 to 1999 Colin was Senior Lecturer in Sociology, Political Economy and Caribbean Studies at the Polytechnic of North London. Before joining the BBC, one of his works was the 4-part film documentary series "Struggles for the Black Community" which he directed for Channel 4. In 1983, he is also Chair of the Institute of Race Relations.

CLR James Library
24-30 Dalston Lane
London E8
☎ 081 985 8262 x 2571

CLR James Library has the **Three Continents Liberation Collection**, a collection of books, periodicals and pamphlets reflecting the struggles of people living in Britain, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

INFORMATION IS POWER

Fidel & Isha Persaud use colourful costumes to illustrate and accompany a vibrant display of inspired Asian Classical Dance routines.

Brother Niyi puts the music back into poetry as he raps from his collection of alternative lyrics that will definitely liberate the mind.

Turkish Folk Music with **Selam**, accompanied by the **Saz** a Turkish musical instrument and **Nazim Hikmet Popry Rockat**.

refreshments

children with parents welcome

Access: building has level access via main door with stairs to children's section.

Transport: Buses 226, 228, 33, 38, 56, 277 to Dalston Lane. 67, 75, 149, 283 to Regent Road Station or BR Dalston Junction then about 30 mins walk to CLR James Library.



33: Information is Power (TCLC event) 1992

To celebrate International Women's Week and the third anniversary of The Three Continents Liberation Collection, Hackney Libraries presents:

Children's Day

Saturday 13 March 1993
10am-4pm

CLR James Library
24-30 Dalston Lane E8
☎ 081 985 8262 x2571

PROGRAMME

10 - 11.30 am crafts, design and storytelling by Selwyn R Fleary.
11.30 - 12 noon Turkish dancing with Hakan

2 - 2.30pm shadow puppet show by Ayton Story
3 - 4pm crafts design and storytelling by Selwyn R Fleary

postage stamps from The Three Continents on display
also games, toys, stalls and booksale

parents with children welcome
refreshments available.

HACKNEY COUNCIL
Working for local people

Hackney Leisure

34: Children's Day (TCLC 3rd anniversary) 1993

UKOMBOZI
A Celebration of African Liberation through Music

Saturday
1 December 1990
10am - 9pm

CLR James Library
24 - 30 Dalston Lane,
London E8
☎ 081 985 8262

Admission Free

Patrons: The Poetry Trust, Hackney Council, November 1990



UKOMBOZI
Expressions of African Liberation

10 - 1 pm ● Expressions of African Liberation:
Seminar
Introduced by Youssef Brown
Includes a discussion around the property rights of African Music
plus
childrens activities centred around African Music

African Lunch on sale

2 - 4 pm ● African Liberation Awareness
Workshops for Children
plus
story-telling, Bookbox, music workshop

7 - 9 pm ● Sounds of Africa
An evening of African Entertainment, portraying African Liberation through songs, poetry and music.
With:
Waka Ntuli and Javon.
A theatrical performance, illustrating the struggles of liberation by the powerful use of music and poetry
and
Jasika
A hand playing interesting African rhythms.



This event celebrates the first birthday of the Three Continents Liberation Collection.
Limited Access.
Contact the Library for full details and Access information.

35. Ukombozi: Celebrating African liberation with music (1990)

HACKNEY LIBRARIES PRESENT

PEOPLE AND LANGUAGES

Thursday 26 January, 7-10pm
Hackney Central Library, Mare Street, E8, 0181 985 8262
an evening of talks, literature and poetry celebrating
the launch of two new collections
ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) for Adults
and **The African Languages Collection**

TALKS

Welcome Clir Saleem Siddiqui, Deputy Mayor of Hackney
Interaction between Libraries and Education
Gus John, Director of Education and Leisure
The Role and Importance of ESOL - Hashida Davis, Assistant Director/
Head of Curriculum Programmes, Hackney Community College
ESOL Classes, Materials and Resources
Rashida Laher, Senior Lecturer in ESOL, Hackney Community College
The Importance of African Languages in the UK
Abdilatif Abdalla, Kiswahili poet, author and scholar

PERFORMANCES

Kiswahili Language, Literature and Poetry Recital
Abdilatif Abdalla
Praise singing in Ga and Twi
Paa 'C' Quaye and Ruth Manu from Ujamaa Arts
Yoruba Tales of Resistance
Dayo Okunola reading in English and Yoruba

ADMISSION: FREE • REFRESHMENTS AVAILABLE

36: People & languages event

BLACK CELEBRATION MONTH IN HACKNEY LIBRARIES

Launch of Nationality Languages Project

Friday 19 July, 7 - 10pm
Stamford Hill Library Portland Avenue, N16

Join Hackney Libraries for an evening of poetry and prose to launch the Nationality Languages Project, based at Stamford Hill Library. This Project, more of a 'resource centre' rather than a mere collection, brings together classics - old, new and almost lost - from the nationality language collections of materials in Asian, Cypriot, African and Caribbean languages, held in all Hackney Libraries. Listen to the reading of poems, authors and poets, and contribute your ideas on how to expand and increase the use of the nationality languages collections and our 'resource centre'.

readers will include:
Imam Ismaili 'Sapan' Urdu & Gujarati poetry
Ravi Lohiya Arabic poetry
Nafisa Osman Arabic poetry
Ismail Ismaili Turkish poetry
Roshni Singh Hindi/Gujarati poetry
Sandra McIntosh Patois (Jamaican) poetry

display of illustrations by Nana Ganyu for Hackney FACT (Parents and Children Together)

FREE entrance and refreshments
event will take place on first floor of library, there is no lift.

H Hackney Education and Leisure

BLACK CELEBRATION MONTH IN HACKNEY LIBRARIES

37: Nationality Languages Project launch

AFRICA SPEAKS
Poetry and Prose from Nigeria and South Africa

- Ogon Jones, Nigerian actor reading from Achebe's writings
- Pitika Ntuli reading his own poetry
- Agnes Sam reading from her work

AFRICA SPEAKS celebrates the first birthday of the Three Continents Liberation Collection - books and materials relating to the struggles of the peoples of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America - which is housed in the CLR James Library.

AFRICA SPEAKS is also part of Oxfam's Frontline Focus and an exhibition will be on display. Books, African crafts and African food will be on sale.

● ● ● ● **TUESDAY 9 OCTOBER**
7pm (doors open 6pm)
Admission free but donations to Oxfam are welcome.
CLR James Library, 24-30 Dalston Lane, London E8
☎ 081 985 8262
Buses: 224, 228, 30, 38, 67, 76, 149, 243, 277
88 : Dalston Kingsland
We regret there is no wheelchair access to this event.
For further access information, telephone the library.

HACKNEY COUNCIL
Working for local people

38: Africa speaks

BLACK CELEBRATION MONTH IN HACKNEY LIBRARIES

Black Music Fiesta

Saturday 27 July, 7 - 11pm
The Gallery, Stoke Newington Library,
Stoke Newington Church Street, N16

Celebrate the music of Hackney's cultures - bhangra, jungle, reggae, and more - and dance, dance, dance!

Presented by Lloyd Robinson and Earl Bailey of Rhythm Fiesta.

All the music played is available for loan from Hackney Libraries. Tell us about the music you would like libraries to stock.

Entrance FREE.
venue is wheelchair accessible but there are no accessible toilets

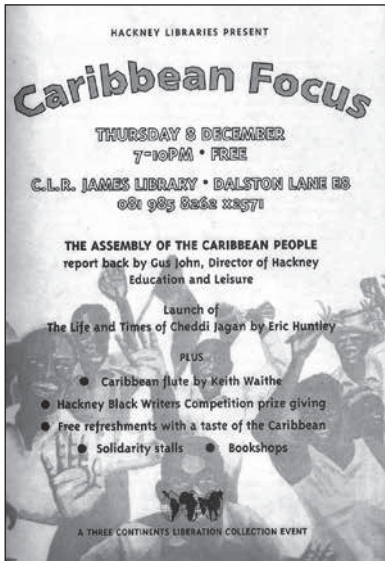
Stock...

Hackney Libraries are compiling lists of books, music and videos that may be of interest to the borough's black and minority ethnic communities. Materials for children and for adults, in English and in nationality languages will be listed. Ask at your local library from July onwards.

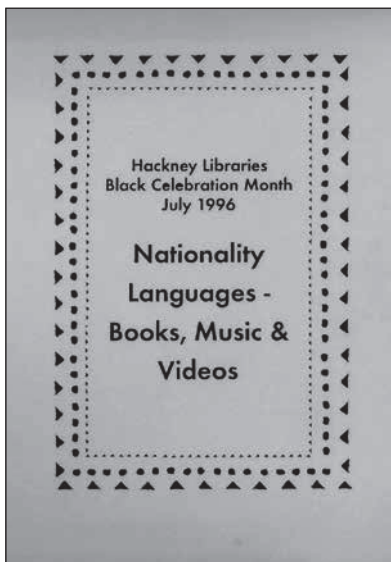
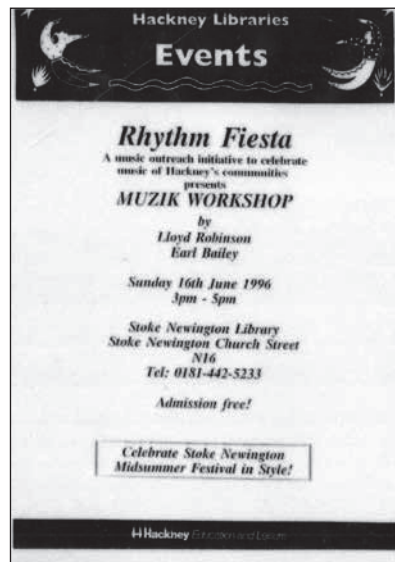
H Hackney Education and Leisure
Funded by Hackney Council, Hackney Borough, July 1998

BLACK CELEBRATION MONTH IN HACKNEY LIBRARIES

39: Black music fiesta



40: Caribbean focus


41: 23 Nisan Çocuk Bayramı -
Turkish children's festival (1991)

42: Nationality languages material
launch (1996)


43: Rhythm Fiesta (1996)

After emphasising that the TCLC was launched in October 1989 “as one of the Special Services envisaged in 1985”, the report makes it clear that the “Library Management felt that the ‘aims of the TCLC in many ways represent the aims and objectives envisaged by [elected] Members, Management and the community when the renaming of C.L.R. James Library was achieved’”. Durrani and Dunn (1991) clarify the aims of the TCLC for library management:

The TCLC aims to provide a resource collection of materials, including books, periodicals, pamphlets and tapes that reflect liberation struggles against economic exploitation and social oppression in the three continents – Africa, Asia, Latin America as well as in the Caribbean and in Britain.

But the TCLC was not seen as a mere collection of material, however important, wide-ranging and revolutionary it was in changing the Eurocentric perspectives of British public libraries. The Report goes on to provide the other aspect of its aims:

An equally important aim of the Collection is to bring together Hackney-wide Black and Ethnic Minority organisations, community groups and individuals to support the Collection and to become a centre of their culture, social and educational life.

The Development Report made it clear that the C.L.R. James Library had long been recognised as a “Library of Black Pride”, reinforced by an article in the Black British newspaper *The Voice* (London), which on December 4, 1990 stated: “the library houses one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of black literature in the country”. Thus the purpose of the Report was “to continue the development of the Collection along these lines, particularly in view of the changes taking place in the Library Services as a result of restructuring”. It should be noted that the process of “restructure” has been used in local authorities by conservative librarians to target for closure the services they disapprove of, as well as to get rid of progressive or “difficult” staff, but under the cover of “improving services”.

This aspect of the use of spin and language manipulation that conservative management deploys in order to cover-up service

and staff cuts is captured by a short poem written by the present author and published in *Hackney NALGO News* (May 1993, p. 4). The Library NALGO (trade Union) Stewards Committee in Hackney Libraries played an active role in ensuring that the service followed trade union guidelines and that the Union was involved in all aspects of the restructuring of the service. Indeed, a member of the library steward's committee worked at the Union office for six months to support Union perspectives on restructure and edited its newsletter. The use of progressive trade union media is yet another aspect of progressive librarianship which seeks alliances with other progressive forces. The poem mentioned above is entitled *Management song: cuts will always be cuts*:

Cuts will always be cuts

This is the management line:
 Let's call cuts in our services
 "restructuring"
 Let's call job losses
 "redeployment"
 Let's disguise a drop in service
 with "Quality Management" jargon.

Everything else can then be
 "redirection of resources"
 Call it what you will
 let's build a mountain of lies
 under which truth will be buried
 Just let's not call a cut
 a cut.

So the days and weeks pass in deception
 In a year's time
 Who will recall
 the restructuring
 the redeployment
 and the Quality Thing.

Nor will it matter.

We'll all be upgraded or get higher jobs.

The cuts will be forgotten.

Or so hope the managers.

Memories are long

Human tragedy is never forgotten.

Restructuring will live forever

in people's minds.

It is interesting to note that sometimes the poetic form is better able to catch the structures ("restructuring" perhaps) of feelings involved in the struggle against conservatism, than the prosaic or report form.

Durrani and Dunn's Report (1991) – the TCLC Development Report – saw the danger of the management plans to dilute the essence of the Collection and to dump other non-TCLC responsibilities onto it, thereby ensuring its gradual death while retaining the name. They therefore set out a clear requirement for the TCLC in the environment of the structure change. They proposed that the "development of the TCLC should not be seen in isolation but essentially as an integral part of the development of the C.L.R. James Library." They went on to list various requirements to ensure the survival and development of the TCLC and the Library. They set out detailed recommendations under various headings: physical accommodation (and provided a chart of how it should be done) in the immediate, short and long term perspectives; administrative and management structure; staffing and staff training; resources; future developments; equipment for activities; publicity and promotion. Some key points from these recommendations are given below to indicate the thinking behind the development proposals:

- The development of the Collection from the beginning has relied on the solidarity of the TCLC Support Group made up of interested Council, community groups, local Black and Minority organisations and individuals. It is essential that this body should not only be recognised for its input but should be strengthened as a monitoring and advisory group for the Library and the Collection.

- The direction in which information services are now going is no longer towards a shelf-bound, static book-orientated service. In many respects, libraries have to become more attractive to their target users by involving themselves in more outreach activities that can make them centres of community activities. In its brief existence, the Collection has begun to make a major contribution towards this. Events organised have attracted many positive comments. This suggests that this approach could be used in other libraries as well.
- The staffing of the library after restructuring will need to be planned carefully to ensure that staff are committed to the aims of C.L.R. James Library and to the TCLC.
- Funds were sought, among other areas, for the building up of recently developed "fiction from the Three Continents", children's material from the Three Continents; popular music from the Three Continents; posters for loan to schools and community groups.
- Since the scope of the Collection goes beyond a collection of books on shelves, promotional activities are an essential part of the Collection. It is proposed that 2 events a year be programmed as on-going activities: Anniversary of the Collection (October each year); May/June each year to mark the death of C.L.R. James (May 31, 1989).
- [the establishment of a] *Liberation Newsletter* to publicise events, new books and periodicals, to include creative output of the proposed Liberation Writers Group.
- A Liberation Writers Group is being formed as a result of a joint initiative of Jenako Arts, Hackney African Organisation and the Three Continents Liberation Collection. Jeneko Arts have been running their writers group for about 8 years and have established themselves through their performances throughout London. Hackney African Organization has been

in the forefront of promoting Africa and has been active in bringing together African-Hackney people. They have taken an active part in promoting their languages, culture and education generally. The TCLC has been promoting the collection and dissemination of information from the Three Continents It has also encouraged creative activities. The three organisations have been discussing the possibility of forming the Liberation Writers Group ever since the "Friends of the TCLC" was formed about two years ago. They have now concretised the proposals. The document set out the aims of the Group and provided detailed proposals and requirements for Senior Management to action.

The TCLC Development Report was submitted to Senior Management on 21 March, 1991. On 2 May, there took place a meeting between a representative of Senior Management and Shiraz Durrani, one of the authors of the proposal. Points made by the management at the meeting were summarised in a memo dated May 7, 1991 from Shiraz Durrani to Senior Management. Key points in this included the following, indicating the direction the management was taking. This explains one of the reasons for the eventual death of the TCLC (emphases added):

- In the short term, to maintain the collection, *but not "develop"*
- Bookstock funding ensured for the *current year* [only]
- Liberation Writers Group: the project not to be carried on for now although SMT were in favour of it
- The main outstanding work is the processing of books from closed libraries [i.e. the TCLC and service aspects have no priority]
- In the long term, SD to write a "business plan" to be incorporated into the Area Business Plan
- The TCLC to take over some "current functions of the two community librarian units" – without any staffing

[in effecting taking over the work of the former Section 11-funded service to African Caribbean and Greek-Cypriot communities which had 2 dedicated posts, now being abolished].

The contrast between the vision that the TCLC Report showed and what the management saw as its future could not have been starker. It is clear from this that, in effect, the Senior Management had decided to close down the TCLC, but quietly and gradually so as not to antagonise communities. It also quietly ended the work of the specialist community service unit while continuing the myth that the services were being transferred to C.L.R. Library which in effect was to become a ghetto service for ethnic minorities. No other library was considered able to provide service to minority communities, and they continued to provide services to their traditional users.

The Management decided on this action as it was aware that a number of factors which had supported the TCLC had now weakened. These included a relative weakness of the Black Workers Group through internal differences promoted by management; the abolition of the Units which had championed services to the African-Caribbean and the Asian units. At the Council level, there had been changes which meant the TCLC support was lessened with the abolition of Black and Minority Ethnic Borough-wide unit which had come directly under the Chief Executive of the Council. This was being replaced by a powerless "Equality and Diversity" Unit. At the community level, many community organisations which had survived through financial and other support from the Council found the Council withdrawing support from many of the most militant organisations, among them the ones which had supported the TCLC. Having weakened the TCLC as a result of these internal and external changes, the Senior Management took advantage of restructuring to ensure that key people behind the TCLC initiative were moved to other areas of work, and with no power or position to provide support for the TCLC.

It is clear, however that in its short life, the TCLC played a key role in generating ideas and practices of progressive librarianship. The conservative library establishment hit back at the first opportunity it had because of the very success of the TCLC. The form of the TCLC was kept alive for a while but without the content. It was thus limited

to a book collection with no community links, no outreach activities. Later, even this token “support” was withdrawn gradually and the stock was integrated into the “mainstream” collections under the pretence of “integration” of a marginalised service. The management’s request for a “business plan” was merely a bureaucratic scheme to make the Project get lost in a web of never-ending reports and discussions without any concrete outcomes – a common management ploy to avoid taking positive action yet seeming to support it. At the same time, the timescale given for the submission of the Report was calculated to ensure it could not be handed in on time as explained in a memo to Management from Durrani on 7 May, 1991: “I pointed out that this (business plan to be ready by end of June) may be difficult as I will be on leave for about 4 weeks and also because it is not possible to get extra staff to enable me to work on the report”.

Subsequently, Durrani responded to the Senior Management proposals in a memo to all members of the senior management team.⁴⁴ This exposes the hidden agenda of the management in killing the project and also the intensity of the struggle over the future of the TCLC. Some points are mentioned below:

- Our document, “Development of the TCLC at CLR James Library” is a comprehensive one, setting out long term and short term development of the Collection. I would welcome a more comprehensive response from the Management on the general issues raised in the document as well as on the specific long-term and short-term proposals. Except for the few points mentioned by [the management member at the meeting], at present it is difficult to know what the Senior Management Team’s [SMT’s] response is to the Document. A written response will help in preparing the business plan, as otherwise one is preparing another report without knowing the acceptability or otherwise of the various proposals. Needless to say, no response was received from the Management as their main purpose was to buy time to kill off the project.

⁴⁴ The date not is available, but it was written soon after the 7 May memo.

- The proposals about “encompassing some of the current functions of the two community librarian units” are too general and vague. They are unrelated to the proposals in our document and need to be concretised before one can judge if they are workable or even desirable. There is a danger of trying to kill two birds with one stone i.e. altering the essence of the TCLC on the one hand and transferring Section 11 functions onto the [C.L.R. James] library. In the process there is a danger of losing the essence and strength of the TCLC which has evolved organically on firm foundations ... The Collection is still young and growing and in danger of suffocating if too much is grafted onto it.
- There is a danger of taking decisions about library service in isolation from the development of the TCLC. A recent example is the decision not to have African languages collection at C.L.R. James Library – a decision made without consultation and against the wishes of the [community] language group set up to advise on it. The Project had been planned for years; there is a growing need for African languages at the Library with the strong language teaching programme at Hackney African Organisation and the Council-sponsored Black and Ethnic Minority Service Delivery Working Party having expressed its concern at the lack of material in African languages.

The Senior Management Team never responded to the above memo. It thus (mis)used its power to ensure the end of the TCLC. By July 1993, the TCLC was “a mere shell of the original vision”, says Durrani (1993) where he also gives a brief history of the TCLC and names the Core Group who set up and supported the Project. Even if the TCLC were dead or dying, it was important to record its history correctly. The above (1993) article was written in response to various attempts to distort the history of the Collection, particularly the very Senior Management member who had opposed the Project right from the beginning, and who was subsequently forced to agree to it when the

Chair of the Community Services Committee expressed her strong support for the proposal. In a classic move to rewrite history, she claimed to be the lead person behind the Project. The 1993 article set down the correct history. She, of course, did not respond to the correct version of history.

The struggle for progressive librarians is not only to fight for establishing its ideas and practices in the face of opposition from a conservative establishment, but also to ensure that the history of the events and struggles of the library's community are recorded correctly. Otherwise the achievements, the successes and challenges of the time are forgotten or distorted and future generations are deprived of the correct lessons of history. Durrani (1993) states:

Those who were behind the project [TCLS] will bear witness that the biggest challenge was to convince the Library's Senior Management about the viability and necessity of the project. Many petty technicalities were raised time and time again and had to be struggled against before the project finally took off. A full history will one day record how many good ideas which were perfectly feasible could not see the light of day because of the cynicism and total lack of interest and in fact active discouragement from some whose simple agreement could have allowed us to work miracles.

Durrani (1993) goes on to record the achievements and difficulties which had to be overcome to establish the TCLC:

The greatest difficulty facing the Group was to get the approval from Library Senior Management. ... It took years of struggle for the proposal to be accepted. Finally a letter of support from the Chair of Community Services, Hajra Khote helped to turn the tide in our favour. The project was approved almost overnight. A sum of £4,000 for the Collection was suddenly made available. In itself this was an insignificant amount in comparison to the overall stock fund, but was a major victory for the TCLC. Although no additional full time staff could be found to set up or develop the Collection, it ran entirely on the enthusiasm of a large number of committed staff.

Durrani (1993) goes on to see the final stages of the TCLC:

Just as the TCLC was being consolidated, there came restructuring of the Library Services. Little account was taken of the special needs of the TCLC although reports were again written about dangers of lack of support for the Collection. It has been suffering ever since. A shell remains, for how long and in what form remains to be seen. In the meantime library staff can take just pride in [having created] a socially relevant service where none existed before.

And thus ended the Three Continents Liberation Collection – killed in stages by small cuts over a period of time.

Evaluation

The question remains as to the success of the TCLC. The answer depends on the criteria one uses to assess success. If it is sustainability over a long period of time that is important, then the TCLC was certainly not a success. But if one considers its contribution in terms of developing ideas and practice of progressive librarianship, then it has made great contribution. Again, if one sees it as a progressive library guerrilla movement, and not as taking over the entire territory of a library service, then it did contribute within its remit. It learned lessons from earlier experience in Kenya by ensuring that a “library” is not seen as a collection of books only, but as meeting informal educational and cultural needs of the community it serves. It defined very clearly who its community was, a lesson that all progressive librarianship movements learn well and one that the conservative service ignores under the blanket guise of providing a “service for all”. But the key point was the content of the service.

The TCLC provided a range of information, learning and entertainment services that linked to each other rather than as isolated, disjointed services. All this was provided within the context of the existing library services which was thereby enriched and made more relevant. The approach and the content itself were considered relevant in meeting the needs of people – as judged by the people themselves and indicated by their enthusiastic participation and use of all the TCLC – and “normal” library – services, including book use.

The TCLC set a standard for developing a community-based, outreach-orientated basic library and information service and developed a model which has not yet been fully established in Britain to date. It developed partnership with staff, managers, communities and the wider Council workers to a new height that overcame all the internal and external forces ranged against it. It set up key strategic alliances and formed a strong ideological base that ensured it was clear about where it wanted to go. It also set up various organisational support structures that ensured that it withstood the attacks from the conservative forces within and outside the library service during its short lifetime. It also provided its services from the point of view of the majority, working people. In a sense it aimed to break the monopoly of the one-aspect-only approach of conservative librarianship and provided a new perspective about national and international struggles, thereby helping to widen outlooks and increase awareness of social, political and economic issues. It aimed to give legitimacy to an alternative, people-orientated world outlook. It sought to do what the development of technology-enabled medium such as teleSUR⁴⁵ was to do later for Latin America: provide an alternative flow of information which shone light on areas of struggles not shown by the mainstream, conservative media – and library services.

While the TCLC ensured a high quality of service, it often fell short of ensuring that it provided a high quality of committed staff. This was, in some ways, beyond the control of TCLC as the Borough-wide library management dictated rules and procedures on staffing. Thus, a great weakness that the TCLC had to operate under was that it did not provide as high level of service for children and young people that the adult service provided – mainly because of the non-availability of committed staff.

Yet another lesson from the TCLC was the need for a committed leadership to provide a clear vision and carry progressive people with them. This was related to the need for power to develop and implement policies. Thus in Hackney, when those opposed to what

⁴⁵ "La Nueva Televisora del Sur (teleSUR, English: The New Television Station of the South) is a pan-Latin American terrestrial and satellite television network headquartered in Caracas, Venezuela. TeleSUR was launched with the objective of providing information to promote the integration of Latin America". Wikipedia. Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TeleSUR> [Accessed: 23-09-12].

the TCLC stood for had the power, they used it to change staffing structures and move individuals to other libraries in order to deprive the project of appropriate leadership, both in terms of support structures such as the TCLC Support Group and the Black Workers Group and committed individuals with vision and following among staff and communities.

But the question still remains as to the long-term sustainability of the TCLC. This needs to be seen not simply in the context of the situation within the library service, nor even within the Hackney Council. Among forces at play at the time were national political trends which should also be added to the discussion. At the start of the period when the TCLC was developed, the talk in Hackney and other progressive Labour-controlled Boroughs was to provide a “socialist” library service deeply committed to the principles of equality and fairness. But the onslaught of corporate-orientated policies by the Thatcher Government after her election victories in 1979 and 1982 soon turned the vision of a socialist library service to one of privatisation and deregulation, as Wikipedia (2012b) explains:

Her political philosophy and economic policies emphasised deregulation, particularly of the financial sector, flexible labour markets, the sale or closure of state-owned companies, and the withdrawal of subsidies to others.

More telling were her attacks on local government and the Greater London Council:

Livingstone's high-spend socialist policies put the GLC into direct conflict with Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. Livingstone soon became a thorn in the side of the sitting Conservative government ... By 1983, the government argued for the abolition of the GLC, claiming that it was inefficient and unnecessary, and that its functions could be carried out more efficiently by the boroughs ... The Local Government Act 1985, which abolished the GLC, faced considerable opposition from many quarters but was narrowly passed in Parliament, setting the end of the council for 31 March 1986. (Wikipedia, 2012a).

These developments at national and local level invariably had an impact on the library service. It was not only the new direction that the Government had taken that had an impact on the service. It was the message of a new direction and a new world outlook that had begun to influence professional thinking. While in Kenya it was direct Government intervention in local and national politics that informed library service, in Britain it was a more subtle impact that the Government had that influenced and directed the profession and local services. It was this change in national thinking and laws that took its toll on the TCLC and on progressive librarianship at this stage. Thus the talk of a socialist library service had been replaced by talks of privatising libraries and indeed a senior manager in Hackney suggested that C.L.R. James library could be sold. It is no surprise that the library senior management felt able to disregard all the community and staff alliances that had set up the TCLC and plan its demise, as the programme of the Thatcher Government supported such closing down of democratic and progressive institutions and services.

Today, the TCLC no longer exists and even the name of the Library, "C.L.R. James Library" has been diluted by turning it back partially to its original name, Dalston Library. It is now called "Dalston and C.L.R. James Library" as an indication that the name of C.L.R. James is once again a token fit for the archives which is now also based at the library. And yet, the C.L.R. James part of the name was retained only after a fierce struggle by the community, the refurbishment and rebranding plans initially vowed to scrap the name C.L.R. James all together. *Horsfield (2010)* captures the fierce community action to retain the name:

The council's decision not to use the name of the Afro-Trinidadian writer in the appellation of the new facility, which will replace the current building in Dalston Lane, sparked considerable outrage both in Hackney and beyond.

An online petition set up by BEMA [Black & Ethnic Minority Arts Network] collected over 2,500 signatures. Diane Abbott [the local Member of Parliament] called the move "an insult to his memory". James's widow Selma urged the council to think again and the story was even covered on Gayelle TV in Trinidad.

Today, no activities in the spirit pioneered by the TCLC take place at the library which has reverted to the mould of all other libraries in Hackney, and indeed in Britain. This is in keeping with what usually happens in organisations and even at the national political level: forces of regression and conservatism never give up and successes of progressive movements are seen only as a short-term setbacks for them. Conspiring against such positive achievements begin as soon as they take place and the achievements are “deleted” as easily as deleting texts on a computer screen, with even its history hidden away and “lost” to new generations.

There is a lesson here for progressive librarians. There needs to be a well-worked out strategy for long-term sustainability. In the guerrilla war waged by progressive librarianship against the established library system, any small opening for progressive change needs to be grabbed. The short-term aim is not to take over the entire library system if conditions are not appropriate. Winning small territories and maintaining small “liberated areas” of progressive library activities – such as the TCLC – are important in order to demonstrate to library staff and sympathetic managers and communities and all users, particularly the young ones, that there are alternatives to the static model promoted by conservative librarianship; that the ideas and practices of progressive librarianship can deliver a relevant service to meet people’s needs. There is usually a great deal of support for such ideas and activities among lower and middle-level library staff who have had little or no input in making library policies under the conservative system. There is hope that they can form a solidarity and support group to provide a foundation for a different, democratic and equality-based service. The quality of input they bring to the progressive movements can be crucial in deciding on appropriate practices. They can also make a lasting impact on ensuring the running and maintenance of new services and in establishing links with local communities. Often, they *are* the local community that the service aims to reach. Their contribution and potential is often under-estimated by many.

Appropriate, relevant content and form of library service need to complement each other, as the one without the other is only half the picture. Providing an appropriate balance between these two aspects should be an important area of work for progressive librarianship.

The use of theatre, drama, workshops, film shows, setting up and running magazines that were used in Kenya are examples of extensions to a one-dimensional book provision. While they help to connect the library service to local communities and provide steps in the learning ladder for people, they also help to win over progressive, but currently not active, staff and community members. They help in increasing the number of progressive people working on such activities and give new, progressive ideas and practices legitimacy against which the conservative establishment would have to struggle if it chose to destroy such initiatives. They help also to increase awareness about the real world and to widen horizons among library staff and community members. They help to break the establishment-imposed idea of TINA (there is no alternative) to the conservative information and political systems.

The examples of service development projects, mentioned later in the book, such as QLP and Merton projects are examples of such guerrilla information activity. So was the TCLC. If such projects do not survive when conditions change, it should not be interpreted as failure of the ideas and practices. Successes and failures ultimately depend on the power relations between progressive and conservative ideas in the society as a whole. Such projects are a step in the long road to winning the ultimate goal. However, it should also be noted that the final war cannot be won in only one sphere of information and library services. It has to be a culmination of many battles in partnership with other progressive forces such as the trade union movement, mass media and education with the all-important economic and political fields as the main arena of action.

Black is a political colour: Race equality leads the struggle

“Where race is concerned, black has always been a political colour - one which describes a broad commonality of experience rather than a particular hue”.

Gary Younge. *The Guardian*. Monday July 29, 2002.

In any situation of complex inequalities, for example inequality based on race, gender, class or a combination of two or more of these categories created by capitalism, a particular aspect comes into prominence at particular times, although all the others may also be present in varying degrees of intensity. There is no objective antagonistic relation between these aspects of equality, but those opposed to equality often create enmity among them in order to “divide and rule” over them. There is a feeling among some librarians that addressing issues of racism detracts the profession from its “professional” work. The same applies to issues around class, gender or other aspects of inequality. While this may be true in specific situations, it is also true that not addressing racism can affect all aspects of library work, including staffing, service and technical aspects such as cataloguing as well.

It can no longer be denied that there is racism, both institutional and personal, in Britain. The experience in Hackney was perhaps among the few strong public exposures of library practices in Britain relating to racism. That there was little mention of racism in the profession did not mean that Hackney’s experiences were unique. For example, The Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) – formerly known as the [British] Library Association – sponsored Annual Conferences on “Black Contribution to Librarianship” which regularly recorded similar sentiments from Black staff from libraries around the country. These were not published or considered serious enough to be national or professional issues. But their voice was given wider publicity when the progressive journal, *Information for Social Change* published a special issue on racism in 2000. Various Black librarians documented their experience of racism in libraries. It is telling that no names were mentioned as the fear of reappraisals against those documenting racism can have severe consequences for individuals. The editorial note in the issue, *Views from Britain: case studies and comments* confirmed the lack of published material on racism:

The voice of Black librarians has been conspicuous by its absence in the debate on racism. When it is raised, it is either within the confines of meetings of Black workers or has to be issued anonymously, so oppressive is the situation for

Black workers. *Case studies and comments* are anonymous comments about experiences of racism in libraries from 9 Black librarians. They were circulated at the Library Association Conference "Institutional Racism; stamping it out in libraries" at the Library Association, 12 November 1999. *Information for Social Change* reproduces the Case Studies to make them available to a wider readership. (No. 11, 2000, pp. 16-17).

In spite of a few feeble attempts to address the issue, racism in libraries remains a "non-issue", hidden away from public gaze, awareness and action – except for the victims to whom it remains a real issue of survival. With the current concerns about library closures and privatisation, racism has been driven even further in the shadows but nonetheless remains very much alive. When resistance to the current political and economic attacks on the working people intensifies, perhaps racism will be addressed as a serious social concern.

The question then arises as to how one can deal with racism in a library situation. Some may wish to ignore it; others may try to downplay its extent or minimise its impact. Others blame the victims for racism they suffer. Yet for progressive librarianship, it is not acceptable to ignore it. Jaamit Durrani (2002) discusses a possible approach to ensure that racism is not ignored:

Let us not be afraid to unequivocally state, for example, that in the United States today black people are oppressed by white people, *so long as we recognise* that this is obviously not the be-all and end-all of the situation, as perhaps the Nation of Islam would conclude, but one stage of many in our quest for understanding (so a further stage may involve both race *and* class)⁴⁶.

The quest for understanding racism and then finding ways of addressing it is the approach taken in the experiences in London recorded in this book. In the case of Hackney, it was the Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) communities whose services were marginalised by racism. Similarly, a large numbers of those working in libraries were also

⁴⁶ Emphases in the original.

from Black and Ethnic Minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds and racism affected staffing as well. It is in this context that race became the primary aspect of the struggle for equality in Hackney. The prevalence of racism was also affected by power relations in the library service. Very few BME members reached high or even middle level posts and so remained powerless to influence policies or to challenge practices that resulted in a service that adversely affected BME community members. The question of power in libraries, and indeed in the society, is an important concern for progressive librarianship.

It was when the issue of race in Hackney libraries became primary, when Black and minority ethnic workers decided to challenge the inequality facing them as workers and also in services to communities. When they began to organise themselves into a strong group which began to acquire power, it was then that the race took over leadership in struggling against inequality and injustice within the system. In this, they were aided by external and internal factors. The external factors included the conclusion and recommendations of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report in 1999 and the national debate on racism in British society that followed the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence. The Hackney Council for Race Equality also supported the library staff in their struggle to ensure equality. At the same time, changes in the staffing at senior level in Hackney saw the appointment of a progressive, activist educationalist, Professor Gus John as the Director of the newly formed Directorate of Education and Leisure Services under which the libraries were administered in 1989. Prof. John brought a fundamental shift in the balance of power in the library service by ensuring that equality became a guiding principle in policies and practices in all aspects of the service. Achievements such as Black Stock and Service Group (BSSG) and the work of the Black Workers Group, described later in the book, were possible because of his support. This again highlights the need for power, vision and leadership at all levels if equality is to be ensured and a relevant library service is to be provided.

The significance of race in society is sometimes minimised, and its contribution to the overall struggles of working people against the established capitalist relations and corporate finance interests is often marginalised. That race becomes the primary aspect in a struggle at a particular time does not imply that it is the only aspect, nor that other aspects of equality and justice are unimportant.

But the issue of race inequality had become an issue in Hackney Libraries even earlier than the Stephen Lawrence Report and the appointment of Gus John as Director. Following various incidents of racism in the library, the then Head of Library Service made a “strong recommendation that institutional racism at Mare Street Library be investigated”. (Hackney Black & Ethnic Minority Workers Group). The following item appears in minutes of a meeting held on July 24, 1989 between Library Management and trade Union, NALGO, stewards:

Item 5: Institutionalised racism in libraries

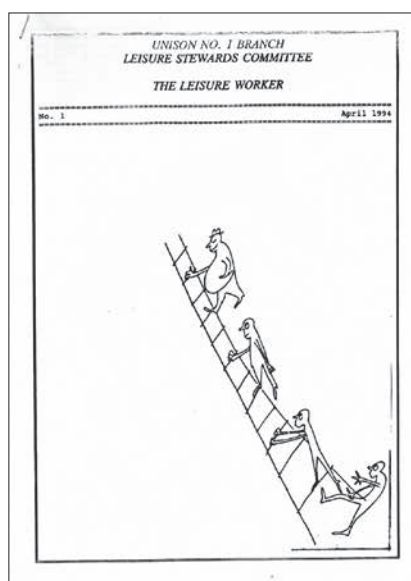
Neill asked if the Union could see the terms of reference and if any start date had been agreed.

PLCS [Principal Librarian Community Services, representing Senior Library Management, SMT] said that draft terms of reference had been produced by Race Relations [Unit of Hackney Council] and a meeting was to be set up with Libraries Management to discuss this, together with the panel membership, timetable etc. NALGO [National Association of Local Government Officers] would get a chance to comment [on] the terms of reference when SMT had agreed them.

It is envisaged that the inquiry would look into institutionalised racism in libraries generally. The process will be started as soon as possible and will take as long as necessary.

The inquiry never took off, partly as a result of delays by management to avoid confronting the issue of racism in the libraries, partly as events moved fast and the situation changed with the appointment of the new Director.

Black Workers Group (BWG) take up the challenge



44: Leisure Worker No. 1

If equality and fairness are to be achieved in any organisation or society, a strong organisation which can “manage” the struggle is necessary. Other requirements are a committed leadership and a clear vision. A combination of these factors can then provide the necessary strategy and tactics for winning power, which then can ensure that equality, justice and fairness are guiding principles for the service or the society. In Kenya, the Library Cell provided the necessary organisation, leadership and vision. In the struggle in Hackney, the Black and Ethnic Minority Workers Group (commonly known as the Black Workers Group, BWG) provided these requirements.

The BWG was formed by joint action of the Council’s Hackney Race Equality Unit and the two community sections within the library service, the African-Caribbean and Asian-Cypriot Units. A meeting, held on November 2, 1989, was attended by representatives of the above sections and 19 library staff members, representing BME staff. A proposal to form the Black and Ethnic Minority Workers Group (BWG) was discussed. The aims of the organisation were to “bring together all Black and Ethnic Minorities Workers in the Library Service” and “to

provide a focus for developing strategies designed to promote the Borough's Equal Opportunities Policy".

Thus was formed the BWG which set out to take up both aspects of racism, relating to staffing and service, as indicated by its Objectives and tasks which were:

- To discuss educational, career information and cultural matters.
- To discuss and advise publishers and producers and educators on negative and racist material. We shall promote positive anti-racist material.
- To liaise with other relevant groups and organisations within and outside the Borough.
- To evaluate recruitment and career structures, in training and work practices.

The objective of working with "relevant groups and organisations" was an important mechanism to get support and solidarity from local and national organisations. In practice, the BWG worked very closely with the trade union movement (NALGO) and indeed some of the BWG officials were also Union stewards. This was an important protection for the BWG as it could not easily be marginalised by management, nor could its leaders be attacked as a way of making them ineffective. Progressive librarians need to form such strategic alliances in order to acquire greater power to challenge management while ensuring security for its leaders.

The BWG's remit included looking at "work practices", which ensured they could look at discriminatory policies and procedures in the Service. At the same time, the Group made sure it was based on principles of democracy by holding elections to various posts, thus when the BWG representatives discussed race issues with senior management team or local managers, they would not be victimised as they would be representing a large number of staff and not be representing themselves as individual workers.

According to the BWG view, there was yet another advantage of having close links with the trade union: victims of racism often require

in-depth support and sometimes counselling while challenging racism. The BWG, as a voluntary group without skills or time to support such members would be rendered ineffective in their main struggle to ensure equality as their energies would be diverted entirely to case representation. It was easy for such cases to be handed over to the trade union, perhaps with some BWG support. This ensured that the BWG would be free to carry on its real work.

However, there were weaknesses in the work of the BWG as was to become clear later. One was the lack of facilities time for officials to take up the BWG work similar to that provided for trade union representatives. While this was mitigated to some extent by the BWG workers being trade union officials, in practice it meant that the few senior BME managers active in the organisation and who had some power over workplaces, policies and practices had to take up extra work, often in their own time, to support the BWG work, as well as provide personal support to colleagues who were victims of institutional racism. This overburdening of the leadership led, to a certain extent, to dilution of the key political struggles which was the main arena for the Group. Issues around race, it must be remembered, are fundamentally political in nature.

An important aspect of the BWG work was that while its focus was on race, it had a wider remit. It interpreted the concept of "black" as a political term and vision, not merely a matter of colour. Between the period from its foundation in 1989 to 1995 when the situation changed dramatically as we shall see later, the BWG kept up pressure on the Management to address issues of race in all policies and practices. It is noteworthy that its action took the form of written memoranda to management and regular communications with its members so as to keep them fully informed and involved in on-going discussions at its meetings. Such meeting in effect became "teaching and learning" sessions as well as a solidarity forum. All discussions were documented in publicly-available minutes. An examination of some of these records indicate the range of racism and equality issues facing the library service, as well as indicating the wide-ranging remit that the BWG took on board. A more in depth understanding of these issues can be read in some of the documentation from BWG meetings, reproduced below.

03-06-1991: Memo from the BWG to Hackney Council's Race Relations Officer, entitled "libraries restructuring - assimilation":

- Management structure and B&EM staff: the distribution of B&EM staff in the library service shows that most of them are at lower levels. There is not even a token representation of B&EM staff at senior management and very few at middle levels. Out of a total of 38 posts at Scale 6, only 2 are filled by B&EM staff ... the new proposals under assimilation will make the situation even worse. Even the two scale 6 posts held by B&EM staff will now be downgraded ... the process will see even less B&EM staff at any managerial posts.
- Training: ... many professionally qualified B&EM staff were systematically denied prospects for promotion with the result that they left Hackney in frustration.
- Service delivery: over the years, service delivery to B&EM communities has been allowed to deteriorate generally throughout the borough. Now the closure of the two community sections (African-Caribbean and Asian-Cypriot) is going to affect service delivery even more.
- Some specific issues:
 - Book selection will now be increasingly done by people who have no direct or indirect links with the communities.
 - The previous policy about allocating specific percentage of book stock funds for B&EM interest material has been allowed to lapse. Many libraries do not order such material in the appropriate quantity. With the curtailment of the specialist sections, the task of monitoring will also be left undone.

- CLR James Library: the development of this library, which is of particular significance to B&EM communities, is also likely to be left uncertain. It was meant to develop as a special library but the restructuring proposals imply that it will be allowed to lose its particular significance for our users. Nor have the needs of the TCLC been accommodated in the proposals.
- Conclusion: there is an environment in the library service which is not conducive to satisfy the needs of B&EM staff nor to provide the required service to B&EM communities.

There is a hidden agenda which seeks to hide cases of institutional racism from those outside the library service. In some libraries, work environment for B&EM staff is extremely oppressive and staff face great difficulties in seeing the service and work places as their own, subject to democratic discussions and decisions.

The report concluded by making various proposals to address some of the issues raised. The Senior Management was in no mood to accept the challenge posed by the BWG. The organised group could challenge management decisions and had the authority to seek support from organisations outside the Library Service, particularly the Race Equality Unit under the Council's Chief Executive as well as organisations at a national level (e.g. the Commission for Racial Equality) and its structure in Hackney, the Hackney Race Equality Council. The library management did all it could to control and suppress the group. But the group was strong and united and had developed support from outside the service, which enabled it to resist management attacks. The minutes of the BWG meeting of September 12, 1991 records one such incident:

- The general tone and perceived objectives of H.W.'s (Head of the Service) guidelines – to seek to control the Group – were unacceptable to the Group.
- Management was seen to be focussing attention on side issues in order to deflect it from the main

concerns of equality of opportunities for Black members of staff and those from ethnic minorities and the question of service delivery to those sections of the community.

- Control of the Group must remain with the Group itself and not be conceded to management it was not for management to determine who might speak or what might be discussed.
- No Black member of staff has been barred from attending meetings of the Group, although one member was known to have decided not to come to them.
- It was agreed that
 - Minutes of the Group should be sent to management regularly; the Senior Management Team should be requested to supply minutes of its meetings to the Group.
 - The Group should write to the Head of Library Services requesting that Section 11 staff [employed in the African-Caribbean and Asian-Cypriot sections] be admitted to the assimilation exercise; the Group should also write to Hackney Council for Racial Equalities asking for support from that body for that request.
 - The NALGO [trade union] representative should send NALGO Legal Department's letter of 22-07-91 to the Chief Executive as a follow up to the letter sent by the Group to him on Section 11 staff and assimilation.

The lack of management support for the Group was again taken up at yet another meeting, that of April 2, 1992, whose minutes record:

- The Group felt unhappy at the [lack of] support from the Senior Management Team, particularly the fact that our memo dated 31-01-1991 to Head of Library

Service had been ignored. Lack of support and proper working principles was highlighted.

- The Groups needs to be formally involved in the process of decision making of the libraries and its services. It was agreed that the Co-ordinating Committee of the Group needs to be consulted in the decision making process at the highest level in the libraries in order to advice and evaluate the services and issues affecting the B&EM staff. It was suggested that these issues now be taken up with the Director of Leisure Services with whom a meeting should be sought.

The Head of Libraries sent a memo setting out *Guidelines for meetings* to the Group on, to which the Group responded strongly, indicating its growing confidence in challenging management which had tried different ways of weakening the Group. It issued a four page statement entitled "Black and ethnic minorities group in libraries".

Before we look at this document, it should be remembered that public libraries in Britain are highly hierarchical, with the Head of Service holding almost dictatorial power over staff. In this environment, the word of the "leader" is the final word and cannot be challenged. It is to the credit of the BWG, and an indication of its unity and strength that it could not only challenge its head of service on issues of equality and democracy, but also take the challenge outside the service to the chief officers of the Council, and even outside the authority. The *Guidelines for meetings* starts with a general statement indicating the on-going problems faced by Black staff:

The memo dated May 28, 1992 from Head of Library Service to B&EM staff in libraries raises many fundamental issues about library management's attitude to B&EM staff in the libraries and Management commitment to equal opportunities. At every stage since the formation of the Group in 1989 there has been a consistent effort on the part of Management to disrupt the work of the Group and to isolate and attack individual members. At the same time they have avoided addressing the serious issues raised in our minutes and memos that show very clearly the existence in Library

Service of institutionalised racism that affects all library workers and also affects negatively the provision of service to B&EM communities of Hackney who now make up 48% of Hackney's population.

The memo from [the Head of Service] is yet another attempt to side step the serious issues that we had sought to raise with the Director of Leisure Services. It seems every time we try to raise these issues with her she finds a pretext to attack the Group and in the process seeks to disrupt the working of the Group.

As far as we can make out the real trouble started with our memo to the Race Relations Adviser on Libraries Restructuring – Assimilation dated June 3, 1991.

The Statement goes on to summarise some of the issues raised with the Race Relations Officer and quotes his note dated 5 June, 1991 to Management when forwarding it to the Head of Service – again an indication of the seriousness of the situation in the service:

The present structure and the proposed restructure do not hold out much hope in fulfilling the aspiration of B&EM staff in Libraries. I therefore recommend that the proposals in the attached memo [from the BWG] be given very serious and positive considerations, if the morale of the B&EM staff is to be sustained at a not below acceptable level.

The Statement goes on to record that the Management “have made no such attempt to date” [2 Sept. 1992]. It re-affirms its support for NALGO's resolution on library management:

The Groups recalls that members of NALGO library staff have passed a motion of no confidence in the Library Management. Members of our Group were present when the motion was passed. We reinforce that resolution. As Black and Ethnic Minority workers in the Library Service, we feel strongly that the Library Management has consistently refused to address issues of institutional racism in the service.

The battle lines were now clearly drawn. The BWG used the only real power it had: taking the issue outside the Library Service for resolution, both to the Council as a whole as well as to the external and independent Race Equality Council operating under race legislation, as noted in the above Statement:

The Group feels strongly that higher officers of the Council now have a duty to investigate the activity of Library Management in terms of its treatment of B&EM staff as well as in terms of service provision by the Library service to B&EM community of Hackney. An indication of its seriousness in this matter could well be to invite Hackney Council for Racial Equality to undertake such an investigation.

The Statement ended on a fighting note:

For too many years has there been a verbal commitment to equal opportunities in the Library Service. It is time this was now turned into commitment in action. We are not seeking favours, not asking for special treatment – merely asking for what is ours by right.

The issues raised in the library service should be seen in the context of how the Hackney Council dealt with issues of racism in the authority as a whole. It is relevant to note that the Council itself had been found guilty of racial discrimination as reported by LocalGov (1998):

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) is to proceed with an inquiry into Hackney LBC [London Borough Council] after the council failed to complete an internal investigation into alleged racial discrimination.

The CRE was due to formally investigate the borough's employment practices, its handling of complaints of racial discrimination and the action it took following industrial tribunals in June last year. However, the CRE suspended its investigation to allow the council to conduct its own internal inquiry. A report on the inquiry was due in June but despite two extensions it has failed to materialise.

BBC News (1998) provides further details on the case in Hackney:

A London council has been found guilty of racial discrimination by the Commission for Racial Equality, after a two-year investigation into its employment and personnel policies.

It gave Hackney council three weeks to come up with an action plan to reform its approach to handling issues surrounding ethnic minority staff.

If the CRE it is not satisfied with the proposals it will serve a non-discrimination notice on the council.

This is a legally enforceable order to comply with measures proposed by the CRE, and is the toughest action the CRE can take against an organisation.

The CRE says the allegations against Hackney which led to the investigation were:

- a failure to address the discriminatory impact of its employment practices;
- a failure to monitor or investigate complaints of racial discrimination;
- a failure to take action after proven cases of discrimination.

The BBC report indicated that an independent report into Hackney the previous year found there had been 99 applications to the Employment Tribunal with complaints of racial discrimination against Hackney. The seriousness of the racism issue in Hackney can be seen from what the Chairman of Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), Sir Herman Ouseley had to say:

It is deplorable that, over two decades after the act first went onto the statute book, a key council which was one of the first to provide significant employment opportunities for ethnic minority staff should now be failing its employees and the public so comprehensively. (Quoted in BBC News, 1998).

It is against this background that the situation in the library needs to be seen. A breakthrough for the library service came with the formation of the new Directorate of Education and Leisure in 1993-94. The new structure was to be in place by early 1994. Unison (which succeeded NALGO) was actively involved in discussions leading to the creation of the new structure. Indeed, a member of BME Co-ordinating Committee who was also a Unison Stewart, was seconded to work two and a half days a week on the Corporate Review for a period of six months. He also ran a Leisure-wide newsletter to keep members informed and involved about developments related to the staffing restructure.

The BWG Co-ordinating Committee was active in a number of fields to ensure its concerns were widely discussed and addressed. This, as noted earlier, was in addition to their main library work since no work time was allocated for BWG work. Among its activities was an on-going attempt to discuss concerns with library managers responsible for specific area of work. One such meeting took place on May 24, 1993 and the notes reproduced below were made and sent by the Library Service's Staff Development Officer to the Head of Library Service on May 26. The notes included the following points:

1. It was felt that one of the most important factors [related to racism in libraries] was the need to define the problems. Although there were definite examples of covert racism at a local level this was felt to be compounded by racism at an institutional level and the problem had to be tackled at both levels.
2. It was difficult to say how this manifests itself but a number of specific incidents were mentioned:
 - Managers/supervisors seemed to favour certain groups of staff when it came to deployment. This was seen as an example of covert rather than overt racism.
 - Timetabling was often seen to favour some staff, e.g. allowing some to work in children's libraries or the reference library more than others.

- Also white staff were often given housekeeping jobs such as counting the money or doing the statistics while black staff did shelving or shelf tidying. It was felt that black staff were not seen to be as trustworthy as whites when it came to “intellectual” tasks.
- In addition, in one case, the only black member of staff at one site was not given a set of [library] keys whereas the white staff were. It was also stated that religious festival leave had not been granted equally ensuring that those staff who wished to celebrate their religion were made to feel that their religion was inferior.

3. Communication at a local level was poor and uneven. It was felt that communication between white managers/supervisors and black staff at an informal level was not as good or informative as that between whites and whites. Often there was a problem of body language, manner of speech or the language used.

Site supervisors seemed incapable of accepting constructive criticism from staff. Formal site meetings should be held with a Senior Team Librarian present and they should be open, honest, democratic meetings.

Site supervisors often felt that they were on the defensive but they should not be put in the position of scapegoat for all the problems.

4. The basic problem was that there are not enough black managers and it was important that black staff be given the opportunity to develop their potential so that they felt confident in applying for managerial or supervisory positions. Staff should be allowed to “shadow” managers/supervisors. Participatory management should be the style adopted by the department.

Following these and other actions on the part of BWG, the Head of Libraries attended a meeting of the BWG on 25-03-93 when the issues raised by BWG were discussed, as documented in Hackney Black & Ethnic Minority Workers Group (BWG)'s compilation, *Racism in Hackney Library Service*.

One issue raised by many managers was that while the BWG talked about addressing racism and institutional racism, there was no concrete evidence presented to substantiate the claim. It is obvious that individual members were reluctant to report on cases of racism as they may not have sufficient skills to gather and present such evidence, and also for fear of victimisation. But the Committee took up the challenge in articles in *Hackney Libraries News* and also in individual meetings. Thus the notes of the meeting of 24 May, 1993 between the BWG and the Staff Development Officer makes interesting reading, not only for the points that the BWG raised, but also because the Head of Library Service took no action on the issues and concerns raised. This ostrich-like attitude to racism and staff concerns was to be addressed later by the new Director of Education and Leisure.

Library services for B&EM Nationalities (DNH) 1994

By 1994, the BWG was getting more confident in its approach. Not only was it being active in policy matters in order to further its vision, it was also becoming "present" nationally by submitting memoranda to national reviews of libraries. One such was the Department of National Heritage's review of public libraries. The BWG submitted a nineteen-page report to the Review of Public Libraries in November 1994 (Hackney Black and Ethnic Minority Workers Group, 1994). The report addressed key issues in library service of relevance to Black communities and staff. This included recommendations on service, staffing and stock. It concluded with a plea for developing "libraries without walls":

The Review of Public Libraries has provided an opportunity to review the way Library Services operate. There is a tremendous potential in the Library service to provide an essential educational and cultural service to the whole population.

BEM nationalities have missed out in many ways in the current form and content of library services. This is particularly true in inner-city areas of large cities where there are significant numbers of BEM people.

A qualitatively different library service could become the centre of the social and cultural lives of BEM people in Britain. Information and education are their main requirements and appropriate library structures can provide these important inputs. For this to happen, it is necessary that a new, imaginative leap is made in the way library service is provided. Building-based services are essential, but they need to be supplemented by a new aspect of service that will serve BEM people in the best way possible. A service that reaches out from library buildings to where people are - in community centres, at street markets, at social, cultural and educational centres which are the bases of social lives of people. Such "libraries without walls" will provide a new type of library service which is relevant to the needs of BEM people.

It is also necessary to link up with the initiatives in education and cultural life already taken by BEM nationalities. These include a vast network of supplementary schools, nationality language classes, ESOL classes, social and cultural associations, publishing and book-selling services etc. The organisation of Notting Hill Carnival and other cultural and social events is an indication of the creative and educational potential and achievements of BEM people.

Libraries should harness all such local initiatives and reflect this life force. Active support in this direction by DNH can be the catalyst to encourage library services to become such centres.

Finally, it is by making available relevant survival information to BEM communities through unconventional, non-conservative methods - i.e. community radio, outreach, word of mouth etc. and making available liberating non-fiction and

imaginative literature of their heritage which will determine whether we as librarians are helping (or not) to perpetuate the formation of an underclass. The social cost of not providing relevant information services to BEM nationalities is too high to contemplate. The Comedia Report mentions some of these. It is a good sign that BEM nationalities are becoming increasingly assertive about their rights to an adequate and relevant service.

It is therefore very important that the DNH defines a politically correct agenda for library/information services to BEM nationalities. This agenda should spell out compulsory policies and procedures so that libraries will no longer be part of the problem in marginalising BEM people through institutional racism, racist attitudes and behaviour. This agenda should also set up positive guidelines to help and enable librarians, and, if necessary, force them, to be part of the solution in making library/information services more acceptable and accessible to BEM people and thus empowering them.

In keeping with the national tradition of ignoring racism as an issue, the DNH and the Review took no action and did not even comment on this detailed submission. Yet another opportunity to redress historical imbalance and ensure equality and social justice in the library field was thus lost.

Hackney Libraries News takes up the struggle

The Black Workers Group in Hackney realised the importance of communications and the need to ensure that its views and perspectives were not misrepresented and were freely available to all. They also wanted to make sure that its claims of racism were documented meticulously and openly. When they had raised issues of racism in libraries, they were often challenged to give evidence that personal and institutional racism actually existed. The BWG decided to take advantage of the opening provided by *Hackney Libraries News*, which was set up by some new and progressive members of the Senior Management Team after the arrival of the new Director. The purpose of the *Newsletter*, as mentioned in its issues, was to:

1. Inform each Area⁴⁷ of events and initiatives taking place in other Areas so as to facilitate the exchange of ideas and spread good practice.
2. Provide a forum for ALL library staff to exchange news and ideas about their area of work. [Capitalisation as in the *Newsletter*].
3. Give information on the progress of the quality process across library services.

The first issue to carry an item from the BWG was no. 11 dated December 1993. This was an important date as libraries officially then came under the new Directorate of Education and Leisure. Although the new structure was to be announced early the following year, change was already in the air and the BWG felt confident enough to put into print what they had been raising at their own meetings previously. The article they submitted was entitled *Racism in Hackney Library Service*. It is also a reflection of the on-going change of culture in the service and the Directorate that the Editor felt able to print such a clear exposition. It is worth looking at the article in detail as it raised many fundamental issues. Below is an abridged version of the article:

Racism in Hackney Library Service Islands of tranquillity

It is common to be subjected to racist attacks – physical or verbal – in the streets of London today ... it then seems that on entering the doors of our libraries we are saved from racism as we enter the safe environment of equal opportunities ... one would then assume that racism is no longer a problem in our library service. But one has only to attend a meeting of B&EM Workers Group to realise that racism exists in very subtle forms. Individuals who are victims of it bear it in silence as it does not seem worth the heavy sacrifice to oppose it. Major aspects of service provision for black communities face decimation out of all proportion to the cuts facing the service as a whole.

⁴⁷ The Library Service was divided into three administrative Areas as part of the new structure.

The users of these services do not even realise what is hitting their service. Those who dare raise questions about these issues are branded as troublemakers and the rumour mills are busy finding the slightest occasion to condemn them as inefficient and useless. The constant personal attacks make it difficult for even the most determined to continue to seek justice.

There is nothing new in such attacks. They have existed for years and years. What is new is the new sophistication found to explain away these attacks. What is particularly disturbing is that so-called professional reasons are advanced for attacking black staff and services. The situation gets more complex as the attacks on black staff and services are linked to the attack on services for the working class. In this respect, libraries are merely a mirror of what is happening in the broader British society in the 1990s. Nor should we expect libraries to be islands of tranquillity in the midst of fierce class struggle in the society as a whole.

It is then necessary not to pretend there are no problems and attempt to hide the fierce class and race struggle going on in the library. The very existence of B&EM Workers Group, of the Community Services Team, the very name of C.L.R. James Library and the Three Continents Liberation Collection, the attempt to ensure the purchase of black material in our stock fund ... all these show that there is a struggle going on and there is a need to ensure that black people get their basic rights. It is not accidental either that these very aspects that assert black presence are constantly under attack from those who stand on the other side of the great divide.

What is essential in this on-going struggle is that we do not take an ostrich-like attitude and pretend that there is no racism in the library service. This attitude objectively serves those who advocate racism. It is better to admit that racism exists in the library service – as it does in the society *outside* the library. There is no shame in admitting a truth. It is in

fact wrong *not* to admit it. Once its existence is accepted ways can then be found to combat it.

Of coconuts and masks

A few guidelines on combating racism need to be made clear. A genuine way of resolving the situation is to expose any manifestation of racism wherever it is found. Failure to do so helps the continuation of racism. Secondly it must be accepted in theory and in practice that it is only the victims of racism who will be able to identify what is racism and recommend solutions to it. It is then the responsibility of senior managers to ensure that effective action is taken. It is unacceptable that those who do not suffer oppression become “experts” in combating racism.

But combating racism is not only a question of colour. The phenomenon that Fanon called “black skins white masks” are called “coconuts” in common language – those who are black in colour but support “white” culture of oppression. Racism in reality is a political and social issue. Many people in Africa, for example, were initially happy at the time of independence at seeing black people in power. It did not take them long to realise that being oppressed by a black ruling class is as painful as being oppressed by a white ruling class. The question to be answered is: on whose behalf does the ruling class rule – on behalf of the masses of working people or in the interest of small petty-bourgeois elite supported by foreign imperialist interests?

Similarly, the greatest damage to black people is done by those black people, particularly at managerial level, who themselves oppress other blacks, but hide their oppression under the umbrella of being black. They take advantage of the sacrifice of those black staff who struggle against oppression and suffer. They gain promotions and enjoy the general patronage of the white system. They actively betray the black cause, for example, by acting as the eyes and ears of the racist establishment which then uses this information

to attack black leaders and organisations to make them ineffective. It is not an accident that the black struggle of the last decades has focussed on the exposure of such “coconuts” who have proved the most difficult stumbling block to progress. Needless to say, those propagating racism find “coconuts” useful tools in their dirty tools bag.

In order to combat racism, one has to be able to identify its manifestation first. How then does one identify the manifestations of racism? One needs to begin by listening and observing. Listen to the voices of those at the bottom of the heap. Observe the behaviour of those in positions of power who can stop racist attacks, but fail to do so, or indeed themselves become agents of racist attacks.

... in the libraries, the Senior Management is very correct in its position in combating racism ... and yet racism persists. One reason for this is the lip service paid to eliminating racism by middle and lower level managers. It does not take long to see through the empty mouthing of anti-racist rhetoric from some managers while they tolerate or even practice racism – however cleverly covered up in correct “professional” and local government jargon. Often such managers avoid taking actions against racism by turning the whole situation on its head by asking the victims of racism to prove the existence of racism. The victim becomes the accused and the trial judges are the very racist managers themselves. No wonder racism is so difficult to eliminate!

This article is merely making a plea for more openness to exposing and accepting the existence of racism in library service. This applies equally to those in positions to prevent racist attacks and to the victims of racism. It is easier for the victims to voice their concerns at Black meetings as they are confident that they will not be condemned or face hidden attacks later. But it is essential that they take the courage to come out in the open to raise the problem in the open. The Editor of the *Newsletter* has done well

by assuring contributors that their confidentiality will be respected should they wish to raise specific issues.

The Senior Library Management would do well to state openly again that those who challenge racism in our service will not face hidden attacks. There is a fear that if one raises issues dealing with racism, they will be attacked on some other pretext, e.g. lateness, capability, etc. The real reasons for which they are under attack are that they dared to challenge racism. For example, it is easy to accuse a black member with being inefficient or not being capable of working in, say, the reference library or in the children's library. On the other hand, when white staff are really bad performers, they are shielded from any disciplinary action by being warned verbally or by not being time-tabled to work in areas they find difficult. They are shielded even from major mistakes. Unlike the black staff, they do not have to beg and plead for those rights which are given them as a matter of course.

Often black staff do not get adequate training or experience in certain types of work which can improve their overall performance or give them experience which they can use in applying for higher level jobs. It is a common saying, for example, that there are two categories of staff: the favoured ones who get to do a wide variety of work including managerial work, and the "second class" staff who end up with the dullest, most routine tasks. Most of those in the second category just happen to be blacks. It is these double standards that black staff have to struggle against.

How does racism manifest itself?

In order to set the ground for a fuller exposure of racism in the library service it is important that its manifestations are exposed. It is the shadow that reveals the shape of the hidden substance of racism, the slow poison in our society that will kill the patient if not stopped in time. Below are a few of the manifestations. It is only by bringing them out in the open that they can be attacked.

Here the article gives details on a number of manifestations of racism, summarised below to indicate the range of issues taken up by the Black Workers Group:

1. The existence of double standards in everyday work: mistakes by white staff are quickly forgiven, those by black ones result in severe punishment ... white staff find it easier to move up (in grades) although there are a few “unflavoured” ones who have joined their black colleagues at the bottom of the heap ... these are often the articulate, the class conscious or strong union supporters – in other words, the “troublemakers”.
2. Ground rules are constantly changed so as to make it difficult for black staff to challenge racist practices.
3. It is a common practice for some racist managers to make personal attacks on individual black staff when their ideas cannot be attacked.
4. Massive bullying of black staff takes place. The contribution of black staff is not only not acknowledged but is often undermined.
5. Racism is practiced so openly that at some meetings, for instance, white staff openly gang up against black staff, using insulting body language and laugh unashamedly at black staff and their policies.
6. A scapegoat is soon found for racist practices.
7. A common tactic to avoid taking anti-racism action is to say “yes” at the time, but to avoid taking action – the “Yes Minister” method. Another tactic is to use bureaucratic delays.
8. False arguments are made that there is no demand for black material when no efforts are made to promote the material.
9. “Professional” arguments are used to justify why no black material is purchased.

10. Senior managers have advocated the establishment of a "White Fund" to counter the Black and Ethnic Minority Fund, betraying their total ignorance of the concepts and reality of social oppression and economic exploitation in our society.

The article ends with a plea for resolution of racism:

The above are merely a few examples of a vast network of everyday racist practices which work against black staff. This is not the first time they have been raised. One hopes the time is near when steps will be taken to end such unprofessional, unjust practices. Racism is a painful experience for the victims. It is wasteful for the employer. It is time black staff in libraries are allowed to concentrate their energies in their work, instead of having to fight racism every day.

The significance of this important written challenge to racism in libraries can be seen from the fact that this was perhaps the first time that such a detailed record of racist behaviours in libraries was written and published. The points raised in the article were not in doubt as far as Black library staff nationally were concerned. This is shown, for example, at the discussions at the Black Contribution to Librarianship" conferences, sponsored annually by the Library Association (LA, now called CILIP), "or in the special issue of *Information for Social Change* which we will examine later. Thus issues around racism had remained hidden among Black library workers, with the conservative establishment refusing to address it or even to admit its existence in libraries, let alone addressing the serious problems this was causing for Black workforce and also leading to uneven service development for local communities.

Two responses to the article, *Racism in Hackney Library Service*, appeared in the following months in the *Hackney Libraries News*. The first was from the Senior Management Team, carried in issue no. 12 (February, 1994) of *Hackney Library News*:

In response to the article in the Staff Newsletter and a number of letters from individual members of staff, the Libraries SMT would like to make the following views known:

1. The article came from the Black Workers' Group (BWG) and raised issues which have come up numerous times at Black Workers' Group meetings. These are attended by 30+ members of staff and reflect a broad consensus of perceptions.
2. In order to broaden the debate and air the issues with the whole of the staff the article was accepted for the Staff Newsletter. Racism is not just an issue for black workers but all staff.
3. The article is written in the context of a racist society. It is constructive about (a) the Council's Equal Opportunities policies; (b) the Library Management Team's support for the BWG; (c) "racist behaviour is immediately stopped".
4. Racism is overt and covert. Many black workers talk about an atmosphere of oppression which makes it difficult for them to raise issues. The Newsletter is a channel for these issues to be raised.
5. It is silly to pretend that there is no racism in libraries. Once its existence is acknowledged, ways can be found to deal with it. There is nothing unhealthy about open debate.
6. Not to tackle racism is to condone it. Only the victims of racism know what racist oppression is like. We should ask them for possible solutions.
7. Not all black managers are "coconuts": not all white managers are racist. Managers should not feel defensive or under attack. They should accept there is a problem, offer support and seek to deal with it. The article contains general statements not specific accusations.
8. The article does not bring the Council into disrupt [this perhaps reflects the contents of the letters that SMT received from some staff members] ... it identifies

the problem as being that these policies are not being put into practice sometimes.

9. The article supports the Libraries' Senior Management Team's attempts to deal with racism.
10. Asking the victims of racism to prove the existence of racism is not necessarily the best or the only approach to the problem.
11. This article is merely making a plea for more openness in exposing and accepting the existence of racism in libraries, as a reflection of society as a whole.
12. Black staff should be encouraged to raise allegations of racism. Managers must then determine, with the black member of staff (a) whether it is perception or a problem; (b) whether it is racism or not.
13. All staff must be treated equally and there must be no double standards. The article gives a number of manifestations of racism. Here is our response:
 - a. Black and Ethnic Minority funding has been used to buy non-black and ethnic minority stock, e.g. Black Beauty.
 - b. At a Community Stock meeting some white managers did ask for a "white fund" to be established.
 - c. Massive bullying of black staff. Some managers are more forceful than others. A manager who is "hard line" to white staff is perceived as a much greater threat by black staff.
14. To not print the article or censor it must add to the claims that issues are raised repeatedly and not dealt with, just swept under the carpet. It is better to get these views out in the open and answer them one by one.

15. We have made much progress dealing with racism in Library Services. The following is a report of work currently being undertaken in response to specific work practices which have caused the Senior Management Team to be concerned:

- a. Staff timetables and work locations in Central Area [here the SMG gives further details under each heading].
- b. Task/allocation
- c. Training
- d. Annual leave

In response, the BWG expressed the hope that “such a positive response [from SMT] will be followed up by an in-depth investigation and concrete action on each individual issue”. The Group saw the need for a unity of Black and White staff by saying that “many white staff suffer similar oppression”. The BWG made a plea “to let us work together in order to have a fair society *for all* [emphasis in the original], adding:

We are mindful of the social oppression facing women, lesbian and gay men, people with disabilities, among others – whether white or black. Together we can overcome all social oppression. No group in society can be free while any one suffers oppression. The important thing is to accept that we all need to be made aware of what others suffer and then try to eliminate the problem.

The second response to the BWG article was from a (white) Senior Team Librarian who wrote under her own name. This was published in *Newsletter* no. 13. It reads:

I feel angry about the offensive and destructive way that the issues of racism that exist were raised in the inappropriate form of the Staff Newsletter. I support open discussion but the generalization of the article has turned justifiable complaints into unsubstantiated accusations against

individuals, (not named but obviously implied) in a vicious way. This can do nothing but cause anger and polarisation of positions among staff. It also undervalues a great deal of hard work done by managers to strive towards equal opportunities for *all* staff. I am particularly shocked by the reference to black managers as “coconuts”. There are so few black managers, I am aware that some feel particularly upset and offended. I fully support the idea of a Black & Ethnic Minority group and understand that issues raised are taken directly to SMT [Senior Management Team]. There are some very serious matters raised in the article which should have been investigated by HLS [Head of Library Service]. I would like to ask the Black Workers Group and senior management team why these complaints were not specifically raised and channelled through the complaints system, where all sides of the issue can be examined in a fair way, instead of sweeping generalisations which have several people feeling uncomfortable and wary of expressing opinions for fear of being misquoted and unjustifiably criticised. In a large institution, there are always going to be instances of racism and we must consistently be looking to challenge them. The HTDC [Hackney Training & Development Centre] materials recommend that challenges should clearly and specifically identify unacceptable behaviour. I support this way of working together to create a fair working environment. This kind of article works against this approach.

The Black Workers Group’s own response to these developments came in issue no. 13 (March 1994 – three months after the original article). They stated that “there was a lot of pressure on SMT for having published the article”. It continued, “at the same time, reactions towards black staff, after the publication of the article, have ranged from silent hostility to sympathy”. However, the issues on racism raised by the BWG article could not be ignored any more. This, together with a changing balance in the SMT following appointment of new senior members, brought about a change in the SMT position. In the background was perhaps the most important factor which drove the change in the library service: the appointment of a new Director

of Education and Leisure who was totally committed to equality in theory and practice. It is doubtful if the major changes in the attitude of SMT would have taken place without the pressure from the new Director. It is interesting that the SMT talks about “not tackling racism is to condone it”, yet this was not the first time this issue had been raised and the management had not considered it necessary to even mention it in the past, even when the matter had been referred to the Commission for Racial Equality. The extent of this change was indicated in the SMT’s public response to the article, mentioned above.

However, the BWG’s wish for further investigation and action remained unanswered in a society long-trained to ignore oppression and exploitation. The missing political factor added to their powerlessness. But this powerlessness was transferred for a short time when the new Director of Education and Leisure came with a powerful message of equality and justice. This was Prof. Gus John, a long-time activist in education as well at the community level. Prof. John had become Director in 1989 but was involved in organisational restructure and focussed on education as a priority issue in the first years. However, he kept well informed about developments in the library service, and particularly the issues raised by the BWG. He set up a library review to examine “the questions before us today: to examine what libraries are there for and how to organise them better to enable us to organise a more relevant service for the next century. It is important for us to examine different influences and issues side-stepped in the past”.⁴⁸ It is also significant that he appointed a member of the BWG as a representative on the Review Committee to ensure that issues the Group had raised were addressed as part of the review.

A clear indication of what changes Prof. John wanted in the library service came in a meeting he called for all library staff on February 23, 1995. The talk was entitled *equality and entitlement*. The SMT, significantly, produced no notes from the meeting and the following points are taken from personal notes taken by the author. Prof. John highlighted the issues he would address: equality and entitlement; staffing, service delivery, including stock and access. He started by stating his assessment of the work of the BWG:

⁴⁸ Quotes from notes by the author from Prof. John’s address to Library staff, February 23, 1995.

The BME Workers Group (BWG) in the Library Service has attempted to influence policies in the Library Services. The BWG brings collective skills to bear on stock, access to service and other issues in the Libraries. There may be a perception among some that the BWG exists as a Fifth Column, seeking to influence policies and practices incorrectly. This is not true, they are properly responding to problems in the system. There will always be problems when we try to side step issues either to maintain consensus or to disenfranchise people. We ignore this [truth] at our peril. It is necessary to examine our attitude towards staff: how are staff valued, how seriously we deal with issues of marginalisation. There is indifference on part of most senior managers in the Library Service.

Boroughs such as Hackney employ local people. Staff are therefore providers as well as consumers of the Council's service. The question then is, do we make space for staff providers and consumers of service? The BWG should be seen in this light as providers and consumers of the Council's service. The BWG has ground intelligence rooted within the dynamics of community. They properly bring this to their workplace. The issues they raise should not be side-lined. They are not begging to be heeded. It is their right. We need to engage with the issues they raise: stock, service, empowerment of users, etc.

Prof. John saw the struggle in the library as an aspect of resistance to oppression:

Resistance to oppression is normal reaction among the oppressed, our fundamental instinct is towards justice ... Wherever there is oppression, there the oppressed will unite to resist. When Black people resist, this resistance is racialised and seen as another reason to stereotype and marginalise Black people.

With such a clear message backed by action, Prof. John brought about a fresh approach to policies and practices in the library service.

The changes brought about by the Library Review ensured that the vision shown by the new Director could be put into practice via new policies. Among the outcomes of this new approach was the formation of the Black Stock Group (BSG) and Black Stock Steering Group (BSSG) which are examined below.

Black Stock and Service Group (BSSG)

The challenge facing the BWG and the Hackney Library Service now was how to incorporate a radical solution to address long-standing institutional inequality in the service within a short period of time while the long-term solutions were being discussed as part of the library review. At the same time, the Review wanted “to examine what libraries are there for and how to organise them better to enable us to organise a more relevant service for the next century”, as Prof. John put it.

The system itself was not capable of changing overnight and become a relevant or an “equal” service as required by the new vision brought in by the Director. The factors that had created inequality were firmly rooted within the management and other structures. National and local laws did not allow for affirmative action to resolve historical imbalance in staffing and services to Black communities. At the same time, the conservative library model that was the norm, not only in Hackney, but most other public libraries in England, was well entrenched and not capable of bringing about the changes that were necessary if the needs of the majority of people were to be met. The impetus for change had to come from a force external to the system.

The approach taken by the new Director as a first step to bring about change was to address the key factors preventing change: the first of these was to change the composition of the library senior management which had been committed to the conservative agenda and had shown little leadership qualities to meet new challenges. He thus established a new senior library management team which was more committed to taking a new road. Another issue was the need for appropriate policies and practices to ensure successful change. The third aspect of the new direction was to empower forces of progressive librarianship which had little power in the past. He thus empowered the Black Workers Group to be able to influence policies in the system.

It was the BWG itself which took the initiative to find an interim solution which would provide lessons for a long-term solution to eliminating unfair and unequal policies and practices. While its representation in the Library Review ensured its views on restructuring the entire system to make it more responsive to local needs in general were heard, its immediate focus was on services to Black and ethnic minority communities. It saw the resolution of this issue as one that could provide answers to question of what a relevant library service was and provide examples of appropriate policies and practices as to how these could be put into practice. The experience itself would be useful in providing training to a larger number of middle and lower level staff who would be exposed to a new way of developing an innovative service. Such a broad training approach would also ensure that the changes would be long-term, sustainable and built on a stronger foundation.

The BWG had attempted to bring about change in developing a fair system in the early period, but institutional conservatism and racism in the system made it difficult to bring about meaningful change. The lesson it had learnt was that those advocating conservative librarianship had become adept at mouthing the mantra of change and equality, but in practice they found ways to avoid taking action and thus preventing any meaningful change from taking place. While agreeing with all the reasonable and progressive ideas from the BWG, they used their networks in the system and their considerable power to ensure no meaningful change took place on the ground. Thus the path of progressive librarianship was made even more difficult as the conservative forces use all the right-sounding slogans to sabotage the very change they professed to be making.

The BWG started looking at ways to empower themselves so as enable them to bring about change. Voluntary approach to bring about change had not worked and the need was to ensure change by strong policies, monitoring and performance management. Since it had been impossible to change the whole system, their approach was to develop an alternate system of developing relevant services to Black communities but under the direction of the BWG. This alternate system would also provide relevant management and professional experience to Black staff, thus addressing both aspects of the problem simultaneously. There was of course the danger of a

“split-personality” service, one for Black communities and another for the rest of the people. But as this was an interim solution, it was felt that the Library Review would then be able to take positive aspects from both the services and develop a coherent “whole” system. At the same time, the BWG began to address the danger of the development of two opposing systems by gradually incorporating all staff from both aspects of the services in their new approach under the BEST programme explained later.

That solution proposed and implemented by the BWG involved their direct control, sanctioned by the new library management and the Director, over stock and service to Black communities, thereby bypassing the established systems that had not only proved incapable of making the required changes, but had sabotaged whatever progress had been achieved previously. The BWG solution was the formation of the Black and Minority Ethnic Stock Steering Group (BSSG). The story is taken up by Durrani, Pateman and Durrani (1999).

After years of decline, Hackney Libraries are undergoing a process of radical transformation. Library staff, in a well-planned series of consultations, came up with a number of Vision Statements. One of this deals with Service to Black and Minority Ethnic Communities. This has become the guiding principle of service to Black communities.

Many significant changes have taken place in service delivery of Hackney Libraries in the last few years. One of the most significant changes has been the emphasis given to services to Black and Minority Ethnic communities which comprise almost 48 per cent of Hackney’s population (including the Turkish, Kurdish, Greek, Jewish and Irish communities which are included in the “White” category in the last population census). This proportion is bound to rise in the next generation as almost 75% of children in Hackney schools today are of Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

In 1995/96 twenty five per cent (£100,000) of the total stock fund (£400,000) was allocated to Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) materials (books, periodicals, Audio Visual etc.). The decision to increase the percentage spent on BME

materials to 25% was intended to begin the process of correcting an historical imbalance. In other words, for many years not enough had been spent on BME materials in Hackney and we are now determined to ensure a fairer allocation for this community.

But it was not enough to set aside an increased stock fund for Black material. An appropriate structure was needed to administer and monitor this increased spending. Discussion and consultation on these measures took place at all levels. The initiative was driven by Gus John, the Director of Education and Leisure Services. The Libraries Senior Management Team put a number of measures into practice, including the involvement of Black Workers Group members at management meetings. This move recognised that Black staff were not well represented at senior levels of the service.

In order to properly spend and monitor the 25% BME allocation, a BME Stock Steering Group (BSSG) was established in 1995. This Group was responsible for the selection of all BME materials - books, newspapers and periodicals, reference material, material in nationality languages spoken in Hackney, music, videos etc. BSSG was a half-way house where part of the existing Stock Services section continued to provide administrative and financial support. Stock selection was overseen by a five-member team of senior library staff and library assistants. Regular (monthly) stock approval meetings were held where material supplied by Black bookshops were looked at and purchased. In advance of such stock selection meetings, BME library assistants were encouraged to make purchase suggestions. The aim was to increase participation and responsibility; empower black staff; provide training opportunities; and involve the Black Workers Group in aspects of managing the service.

BSSG worked extremely hard to organise the purchase of over £100,000 worth of stock. This involved a regular pro-

gramme of stock approvals supplemented by shop visits and ordering from lists prepared in consultation with community members. BSSG also liaised with the Stock Services Team and individual suppliers. Keeping a track of this expenditure was time consuming and sometimes problematic. The work of BSSG was carried out by those staff in addition to their day to day duties. It became clear by the end of 1995/96 that this situation could not go on and that a more formal and widespread system was required. Although BSSG had involved many staff at all levels (including library assistants and library attendants) in Stock selection for the first time, this had created time-tabling difficulties (for example, in releasing staff to attend the Black, Radical and Third World Bookfair).

The Black Stock Group teaches a lesson on equality

The Review of Hackney Libraries presented new opportunities for BME stock work. The stock fund was increased to £600,000 and the BME allocation of 25% now released £150,000 for expenditure in this area. At the same time, the staffing structure was changed to reflect a reduction in Library sites from 14 to 7.

It was decided to make qualitative changes in BSSG in response to the new challenges provided by an increased stock fund and to overcome weaknesses found in the BSSG structure. This was achieved by forming the BME Stock Group (BSG). The aim was to build the functions of BSSG into the new BSG but also to keep a degree of continuity from BSSG, whilst spreading the workload and allocating time for BSG duties.

How BSG worked

In keeping with the wide range of responsibilities that BSG was taking up, it needed a wide-ranging organisational structure to ensure that it achieved its aims. Failure would have given the conservative establishment to point to it as unworkable and increased the pressure to revert to the “establishment” practices. This would have undermined the entire approach of BSG and would certainly have had a negative impact on the Library Review itself.

It is noteworthy that the BSG was suddenly, without warning, visited by external auditors to check on financial practices to assess whether it was meeting the Council's strict budgetary responsibility. There was a strong suspicion that this had been instigated by some within the conservative library group to bring about the downfall of the entire experiment, so confident they were that the Black managers responsible for managing the complex system would not have been capable of meeting the necessary financial and management requirements. After a forensic study of every procedure used by BSG and minute examination of financial records and procedures, the auditors had nothing but high praise for the way BSG conducted its work. This is perhaps another example of the fact that progressive librarianship practices have to ensure excellence in all they do, as any shortcoming, however small, could be used against them to discredit not only the individuals involved, but progressive librarianship itself.

It is thus instructive to see how BSG worked.

The administrative and co-ordinating unit

This was the nerve-centre of BSG and which administered funds maintaining financial records. It placed orders and passed invoices for payment; maintained links with suppliers, with community groups and with Library's Stock Services, as well as all Library staff who had been encouraged to be actively involved in stock purchases; monitored stock use and ensured that material purchases was actually made available at sites, as the previous system had often hidden these in backroom storage boxes. It also undertook some publicity and promotion work.

The unit became functional in June 1996 and consisted of four individuals making up three elements:

1. A Black Area Librarian who was the fund holder and co-ordinator of BEST (described below). He reported directly to the Library Steering Group on BSG matters thus bypassing the conservative structures that had obstructed change in the past. The BME stock fund was placed in this officer's cost centre (which included half the libraries in the system) and he became the official fund holder and signatory.

2. A professional Black member of staff who had carried out the administrative and co-ordinating function almost single handed under BSSG, now continued the work in BSG and provided professional, administrative and co-ordination support. Her other work involved establishing contacts and provide strategy for Outreach, and this enabled BSG to actively involve local community groups in stock purchases. The work that she is carrying out for BSG was complex. It involved financial work (keeping accounts, monitoring expenditure, passing invoices), administrative work (facilitating approval meetings and shop visits), maintaining contacts with, and supporting, the suppliers; delegating research work to suppliers and other staff; co-ordinating work with stock services; community outreach and publicity, and supervising the work of BSG staff.
3. Two Black Library Assistants who spent 50% of their time (17.5 hours) on BSG work. Their work involved all day-to-day administrative work, checking and passing invoices for payment, carrying out research as and when required, preparing or helping to prepare orders, checking lists against computer records to avoid duplication, and ensuring the smooth running of approval meetings and general administrative duties.

The stock selection teams

The real strength of BSG is the active professional involvement of almost 30 staff who were allocated time to help select BME stock. In all, 28 library assistants were involved in 33 tasks (selecting stock for adults and young persons, in books, music, videos, etc.) and some were working on more than one stock area. This compared with 35 library assistants who were on the mailing list of the Black Workers Group at the time. Under the BSSG there were five members of staff in the main BME stock team and the involvement of library assistants was minimal, erratic, and involved only looking at approvals - making recommendations only - with limited empowerment. The new BSG structure improved on this not only in terms of the quantity (number of

staff involved) but also qualitatively (in the amount of decision making that they are involved in).

The selection of staff on different teams was made on the basis of their interest, commitment and expertise as shown in practice during the BSSG year (1995/96). It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find a similar exercise in mass library staff empowerment. For the first time, library attendants were involved in stock selection in their own right. In addition hidden talents in many fields, including music and languages, were discovered and given space and opportunity to develop.

The stock teams were encouraged to get as many other staff as possible - Black and White - involved in suggesting new stock items for purchase. They have also been asked to get feedback from Site Supervisors and other senior staff as well as community members so as to include as wide a range of suggestions into the stock acquisition process as possible.

These teams were the ones who went to stock approval meetings which were held at the Black bookshops on a monthly basis - one for adult books, one for material for young people. They also went to other shops for other areas of stock.

An example of the positive achievements of the stock teams was the work of African, African-Caribbean and South Asian music teams which define BME music, decide on the breakdown of funds between different types of music (for example, Jungle, reggae, African music, gospel, etc.), how many copies to purchase, and which sites need how many copies. The work of the music team was crucial in monitoring the time taken for stock to physically appear on the shelves and in ensuring that the appropriate funds are allocated and spent on relevant furniture, publicity. This helped to overcome the resistance within the system which used such delaying tactics to derail change.

The BEST structure

This consisted of three Team Librarians, each having responsibility for a specified stock area to facilitate and support the work of different stock teams : adult books; young person's books; special collections (Reference; Three Continents Liberation Collection; Nationality Languages) ; Other Areas (Jewish/Torah Collection; Irish;

Islamic Collection ; Combating Racism) ; Music and Videos. The Team Librarians provided a link between the Library Service's staffing unit and the BSG administrative and co-ordinating unit. They went to stock approvals meetings to provide professional and training support to Library Assistants. They helped to arrange shop visits and prepare final order lists from shop visits after checking the pickings lists against the Library's computer records to avoid duplication

Not all members of BEST were Black and this ensured that the BSG structure did not become a marginalised Black group. The integration of BSG structure into the general structure was easier as BEST already provided a basis for it.

Reasons for BSG success

The success of any social experience depends on the presence of positive forces at a particular time. A number of such positive factors, both external to the Library and internal, came together in Hackney around 1993 to bring about the concept and practice of BSG.

The most important factor was the incorporation of the Library Service in the new Directorate of Education and Leisure Services - DELS - in 1993. This in itself need not necessarily have been a particularly positive influence. But the leadership of the Directorate was a radical activist and supported the agenda of the BWG. Prof. Gus John, a man with a progressive vision, courage and commitment set in motion the forces that became almost a revolutionary change in the Library Service. Gus John was an intellectual who not only had ideas for bringing about positive change, but matched these with courage and hard work to implement the ideas. He was ready to support any positive forces that sought social justice. He was totally committed to bringing *education*, in the broadest and the best sense, to the people of Hackney.

This total commitment of Gus John was no doubt the major reason why the marginalised service to Black communities was put at centre stage in the Library service. But this could not have been brought to fruition without forces *within* the Library which could take advantage of this "external" support. A united, strong organisation, with a clear vision and commitment, is another requirement for bringing about change. The Black and Minority Ethnic Workers Group (BWG) at that

time was such an organisation. It had been involved in a long and hard struggle to ensure that Black issues - service and staffing - were given appropriate attention. It had articulated its ideas and concerns in well researched documents. It was well organised and had fought hard to win the right to exist as an independent body which met monthly. It had a strong, united and well led Central Committee which charted its policies and strategies.

More important, the BWG was ready to grasp the new opportunities offered when Prof. John became the Director. It did not merely articulate the grief of Black staff. It was ready with concrete plans to solve the problems that faced Black services and staff. It found ready support from the new senior management that took over Library Service after the formation of the new Directorate.

It is not often that all these positive forces come together at the same time. The opportunity came for Hackney and the Black staff were ready to take advantage of it. By being ready to seize the time, they turned their ideas into action. Thus the concept of BSSG and BSG came from within Black staff and its hard work was carried out by a core of a committed, hardworking BSG unit with support from the broad sectors of Black workers, later joined by all staff.

A bright future?

At the time, it was of course not possible to foresee what the future would bring. It is useful to see how the BWG leadership saw the prospects of continued change at that time. Their assessment is summarised below.

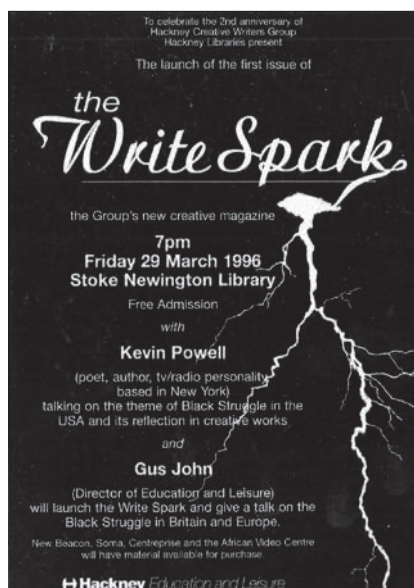
The BWG saw signs - both positive and negative - that pointed to the likely outcome of the positive developments described above. The final result, they felt, depended on how these forces interacted and what support senior management gave to the positive forces to be able to continuing changes. On the positive side the new staffing structure allowed for *structured* ways of service delivery for Black communities. But the negative forces were also evident. Not all the Library staff were happy with BSG and what it represented. The support of the middle management was crucial and it was not certain that it would be forthcoming. The new staffing restructuring was changing the balance of forces on the ground and it was not certain

how long those who control power would support the aims and work of BSG. While formal support was almost guaranteed, the practical and positive will to continue it was in question. In addition, over a period of time, the BWG had been rendered ineffective by internal fights and had become a mere shadow of its former self. There were likely to be few senior Black managers in the new structure. The few committed ones who may survive may be outnumbered and not be in a position to influence policy or practices in future. The chronic weakness of the "numbers game" may be allowed to win once again. Moreover, given the internal Council politics, Directors of Departments can change, thus affecting the balance of forces within the library service.

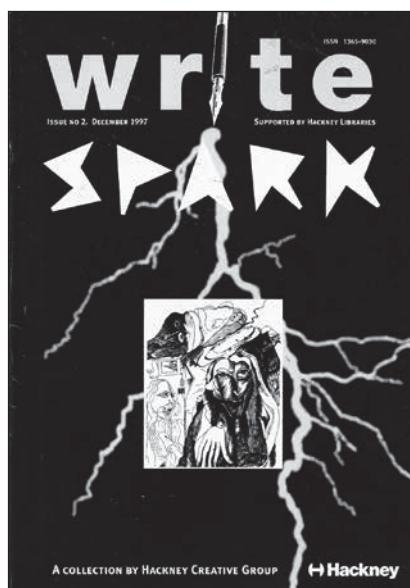
Whatever the future, the BWG assessment felt, the positive example of BSG would remain as a model that has proved itself in practice. It has challenged the often held (though seldom stated) view that Black people could not perform at the highest level, that services to Black communities were doomed to wither because of "lack of supplies", "shortage of suppliers", "bad services", "lack of demand" etc. That in itself was a victory.

In the event, the future of BSG was decided by the changing balance of power. The new structure was changed from the one initially proposed so as to meet new requirements for savings. The need to save was used as an excuse for abandoning the radical proposals such as the BSG. The key people behind BSG were allocated other positions and duties in the new structure and this deprived the initiative of any possibility of survival. Similar fate awaited the TCLC whose scope was reduced and the entire project was "dissolved" over a period of time. This regression was possible as the dynamic Director himself faced increasing hostility from the establishment forces. His resignation marked the final end to the experiment. This was similarly reflected in the move of key members of staff in BSG to other jobs outside Hackney. The BWG, itself weakened by in-fights and external pressures, gradually died. But the lessons of what makes experiments like BSG and the TCLC work, and the dangers they face, remain to inform other similar experiments.

The Write Spark shows the way



45: Write Spark launch (1996)



46: Write Spark. No. 2 (1997)

Once the process of change had started in Hackney, it seemed to gather its own momentum. Suggestions for developing new services came not only from staff members, but from individuals and community organisations as well. As seen earlier, a proposal under TCLC was to set up a writers' group. While this was scuppered by the management, such suggestions were to re-emerge once the new direction in the service had begun to take root. The setting up of the music outreach group, which was led by the BSG music stock team, was one such outcome. Yet another was the setting up of a creative writers group. The library set up the group which met weekly at the Hackney Central Library initially, but then moved to the Stoke Newington Library when the key staff member moved there. The Library Service then set up a biannual magazine under the title *Write Spark*.

Yet another initiative at Stock Newington Library was to develop the top floor of the library as a people's art gallery. The space had been monopolised by a private arts group – the Stoke Newington Arts Project (SNAP) – which was run by only a few vocal individuals. When the Library suggested that the space be opened up for use by local

artists, SNAP used all its power over Council officials and politicians to defeat the suggestion, thus denying the artists from Hackney the use of their own library space. While communities can be allies of the library service, interest groups within the communities try to serve their own narrow interests at the expense of service for all. Such self-appointed “champions of the arts” can pressurise local authorities to serve their own interests. Power politics seems to be the deciding factor in every aspect of library work. It is a question of who one knows and how the situation is manipulated.

One other proposal discussed at that time by some local theatre enthusiasts with Hackney libraries was to set up a people’s theatre movement under the title *Reach Out: an Integrated Arts Project* which set out to link Hackney Libraries with local community groups and professional theatre workers. Much initial planning was done, including the use of the Library Gallery space, to produce plays written and produced by local people, but lack of funding meant that the project had to be abandoned.

But it was the Hackney Creative Group which made a lasting impression on the Hackney scene. Formerly known as the Hackney Creative Writers Group, it was started in June 1994. The name was changed to enable other creative activities besides writing. Other interests included painting, drama and storytelling. The Group organised special story-telling and drama sessions for children and also set up painting workshops for children.

The Group met monthly in Hackney Libraries, initially at the Hackney Central Library and then moved to Stoke Newington Library. Members came with some written work which was discussed and criticised at the meetings. An Editorial Committee then selected material for publishing in the Group’s publication, *The Write Spark*.

There were over 70 members on the mailing list of the Group. Attendance at the monthly meetings varied from about 12 to 20. The Group also organised special meetings a number of times a year which are attended on the average by about 50 people.

The following Introduction and welcoming pieces from the first two issues of *Write Spark* provides more background on the Group and its impact. It also indicates a move from a traditional, conservative library to a progressive one reaching out to people, particularly the working class and ethnic minorities thus far not fully catered for. Again,

this reaching-out was not only through books but by encouraging and supporting creative activities. Its work is best summarised by those closest to it who wrote in the pages of the *Write Spark*:

From: Introduction, *Write Spark* 1 (1996) ⁴⁹

From its first tentative meeting in June 1994 to the publication of this first (of many) magazines the Hackney Library Writers Group has provided a nest bed for the creative writing talents of a diverse cross-section of Hackney residents and workers.

The enthusiasm of the library staff, the inspiration of new writers and the welcome guidance of the experienced writers have combined to produce some moving, amusing and thought-provoking works which will serve as a catalyst for new members joining the group.

The Vision Statement contained in the recent Libraries Review report commits Hackney's Library Service to playing its part in 'promoting a dynamic cultural life in Hackney by providing an accessible environment which supports the creative activities of the people who live and work here.' Hackney Libraries will provide a forum for many kinds of cultural and social expression, particularly with regard to the written and spoken word and thereby encourage people to develop and express that creativity They will particularly encourage the cultural expressions of working class people, of the black and minority ethnic nationalities of Hackney and of the borough's children and elderly people.

The Libraries will provide a safe and non-exploitative environment in which people can express their creativity in an atmosphere of equality and partnership.

Sue Gee ⁵⁰ comments on the content of the first issue:

⁴⁹ Written by Ricci de Freitas, Assistant Director, Leisure and Continuing Education. Directorate of Education and Leisure Services. London Borough of Hackney. 27 February 1996.

⁵⁰ Gee, Sue (1996): Welcoming The Write Spark. *Write Spark*. No. 1. March 1996.

The poems and short stories in these pages come from a small, dedicated group of writers. Each month, for some two years, they have met in an upper room in Hackney Central Library; coming together to read and discuss one another's work: an act of sharing which requires a certain amount of courage but which also does much to give a sense of identity and belonging....

What is published here marks what is in most cases the first appearance in print for writers setting out on this journey. What makes it a distinctive collection is, perhaps, the sense in many of these pieces of a real concern with contemporary social issues: urban life at the end of the twentieth century is here imaginatively explored through the eyes of the homeless, of the asylum seeker, the dream of a better place, a better way to be. The story from Africa also confronts issues of injustice and corruption; against such harshness the opening poem looks to the Mona Lisa, and the eternal power of art to outlast human frailty. But here, too, are humour and tenderness - a meeting with a spider, reflections on motherhood, a wry look at unrequited love.

V.S. Pritchett, the great short story writer, once said simply: "Writing is boring, and hard work, but I like it." I like it, too, and sense in this new anthology how much it means to each contributor. As a new venture in Hackney testifying to the energy and enthusiasm of a community of writers, *The Write Spark* should find many readers.

The Editorial Committee ⁵¹ provides the background to the Creative Writers Group:

The Creative Writers Group was set up following a Workshop organised by the Hackney Library Service on June 24, 1994 on the theme "To be a Writer". The participants addressed various issues such as the practical problems of writing,

⁵¹ The Editorial Committee for the first issue of *The Write Spark* (March 1996) consisted of Sesan Odetunde, Fiona Best, Penny Coombes, Norma Pollock and Shiraz Durrani.

difficulties of getting published, the role of bookshops in promoting creative writing and the need for the formation of local creative writing groups. One of the recommendations of the Workshop was that Hackney Libraries set up a Creative Writing Group.

The Group has been meeting monthly ever since. Participants include some who have a number of books or short stories and poems published as well as those who have never had their work published. There are many who had never written formally before. The friendly, supportive atmosphere at meetings has encouraged many to begin writing for the first time. There is no obligation to write, and those who wish to take part in discussions and make friends are also welcome. Participants come from all social classes, all nationalities, and from both sexes.

Occasionally we invite an established writer to give short talks on different aspects of writing. Such writers have included Joseph Ammo and Susan Gee. But the 'normal' meetings are in the form of workshops. All participants receive advance copies of new work submitted and these are then discussed at the following meeting. Some criticism can be harsh, but it is always in the interest of helping the writer to improve their work.

The Writers Group operates on a self-run basis. There is an Editorial Committee and anybody from the group is free to join it. It had the difficult task of selecting material from the large number of submissions. Many items read out at the meetings are not included in this anthology, not because they were not considered 'good', but because of lack of space.

The Library provides a safe, friendly meeting place for the Group members. It also provides general administrative support. Items submitted in handwriting are typed by Barbara Grey who with Cathy Williams and Emeka Obiandu [all library staff] make photocopies of new submissions and ensure that monthly mailings to participants are sent out

on time. Linda Hanrahan and Sally Stracey have similarly provided silent support or the Group...

We firmly believe that there is creativity in all of us, struggling to find expression. Let it not be suppressed. Let there be more Write Sparks!

The initiative had the full support of the Council. This was part of the new direction taken as part of the library Review so as to connect with other parts of the Council, as well as with all community organisations and individuals. The Council support was shown by the Council's Chief Executive, Tony Elliston, writing in the second issue of the *Write Spark* (January 1997). He also supported the idea of staff working more closely with communities and not providing a passive service:

We do not see the staff of the Council sitting in offices and "providing" a service to a passive people. We expect all Hackney staff to work in close co-operation with local communities, to understand their needs and to plan a service which the people want. Obviously, they need to add their professional and technical input in the process and come out with a service which answers the real needs of a diverse Hackney community. Our motto is "Quality with Equality" and this is what the final service should reflect.

Hackney Creative Group is a good example of the partnership that is crucial in "getting it right" as far as service delivery is concerned. It is a partnership which has achieved a correct balance in terms of community involvement and the support from a Council department - the Library Service. They are in "equal" partnership where all feel free and able to participate as equal partners. Each contributes what it can best provide. But on their own, neither could have achieved what has been achieved jointly.

I am pleased to see that the Library Service has got its priorities correct: while providing free IT services from libraries, it also encourages creative activities through the

continued strengthening of the Hackney Creative Group. The dynamics of this process is capable of delivering a service that can be trail-blazing in the context of local government.

Durrani⁵² explains the background of the group and comments on the role that the *Write Spark* played in linking the Library and the community:

The Hackney Creative Group has been in existence since 1994 ...

The continued existence of the Group and the fact that over this period it has not missed a single meeting is an indication of the social role it plays. There are a large number of creative writing groups in Hackney and neighbouring boroughs. Some are aimed at more experienced writers, others aim to provide "professional" training and charge fees - each has something unique to offer and each has its own supporters. Hackney Creative Group plays its own role in this rich creative culture.

What then accounts for our continued existence and success is a question we need to ask as we bring out the second issue of *The Write Spark*. The answer lies in our firm belief that *there is creativity in all of us - rich or poor, black or white, educated formally or informally, young or old. The Group aims to provide an environment which brings out creativity in all.* This gives the Group its social relevance and hence, life.

It is also important to understand how the Group operates as there are useful lessons to be learnt in the partnership between a Council service - Hackney Libraries - and the community it serves. The part played by the Library is rather complex. While it supports the work of the Group in material and moral ways, it does not dictate the direction

⁵² Durrani, Shiraz (1997). *The Write Spark*. No. 2.

the Group takes. The Group is run by a voluntary Editorial and Organising Committee. Membership on the Committee is open to all members - the only requirement is total commitment to the aims of the Group and the contribution of time and energy to organising the monthly meetings and for preparing the magazine. The Committee sends out a monthly mailing to regular members before each meeting. The mailing includes any new material submitted during the month. This enables members to read new works so that there can be a meaningful discussion at meetings.

The Group operates under the Council's Equal Opportunity Policy which provides a safe environment for members. A member of the Library Service sits on the Committee and provides the necessary continuity and support for the Group. An attempt was made some time back to make the Group independent from the Library, but this was soon changed as it was recognised that the Library support was necessary for the Group's continued existence. The Library also provides photocopy facilities and postage costs for the monthly mailings, the cost of *The Write Spark*, free use of the meeting place and of course, orange juice for the meetings!

But this support in itself could not have kept the Group going for so long. It has never been the intention of the Library Service to run a creative group for the members. Indeed the pressure for the formation and continuation of the Group has come from the members themselves - those who continue to attend meetings and, more important perhaps, the dedicated members of the Committee. It should be realised that their involvement in the work of the Group is not based on any paid work. The Committee members spend a lot of their time, creative energy and often their money (for transport, telephones, postage etc.) to keep the Group going. The continued existence of the Group is their only incentive and satisfaction. Such commitment surely needs to be admired and recommended to all, especially the young....

Members say that they continue to keep up with the Group because of the safe and encouraging environment, the fact that there are no “leaders” who look down at new writers, and that there is no exploitative “stealing” of members’ creative work (an experience many of our members have had in the past). Of course the fact that we are a free service supported by Hackney Council also helps! But perhaps the most important factor is our mission statement mentioned earlier - our belief that there is creativity in all of us. In addition, membership of the Group also provides a social meeting place where deep friendships are forged. The Group has today become a large family of like-minded people who share common concerns and have built up a strong support structure. It provides a friendly shelter to all who face the harsh social reality of life in the 90s.

Is this a “suitable” role for a public library to get involved in? It is for the public of Hackney to decide. The large number of Library members who have attended our sessions - see a record of some of their contributions at the end of this issue - have already voted. As long as the need for the Library’s support is there, Hackney Library will be there.

Thus the creative group points to yet another area that a progressive library service can be active in - depending, of course on the needs of their communities. The example of the *Write Spark*, which itself had learnt from lessons of progressive librarianship in Kenya, passed on its own lessons in a London setting to Merton which launched *Merton Sense* as a youth magazine. This, in turn, provided guidance to the Quality Leaders Project (Youth) which helped young people at Portsmouth libraries to set up its own youth magazine, as we shall see later. The need for role model projects is as important to progressive librarianship as it is to other areas of life.

Merton Library & Heritage Service

Our next stop in the search for progressive librarianship in Britain moves to the London Borough of Merton and covers the period 1998-2004.

The population of Merton in 2001 was about 188,000. Of this, 23.4% were under 19 and 14.6% were over 55 years of age. Dataspring (n.d.) summarises the ethnic make-up of the population in 2001:

75% of households in Merton are White ... However, both Merton and London have higher proportions of Asian and Asian British residents than the national average (11% for Merton and 12% for the London region, compared with a national average of 5%). Merton and the London region also have larger proportions of Black or Black British people than the national average (2%).

Dataspring (n.d.) goes on to explain the growing inequality in the borough:

For Merton, the increase in mean income (Gross individual income) between 1995/96 and 2000/01 was larger than the increase in median income. This shows that the gap between mean and median incomes has widened, and reflects an increasingly uneven income distribution. The same pattern also applies to the London region and England.

This provides a brief background of the situation in the Borough at the time of the initiatives mentioned below.

While it is not the intention here to look in detail at what the issues were that Merton library service faced (which is covered in a number of publications listed in the References), it is important to look at just one report that highlighted key issues in Merton at the time. This was the IDeA Review (Improvement and Development Agency, 2001) which highlighted the areas that needed attention. While the Review looked at the Council as a whole, it also reflected the situation in the library service. However, it should be noted that these concerns were not unique to Merton but were common to many other libraries in London.

Leadership was one aspect highlighted by the IDeA Review which saw the key tasks of leadership as challenging the prevailing departmental culture, encouraging an ethos of cross departmental project working and encouraging innovation and celebrating success. Another aspect highlighted by the Review was innovation and creativity where it observed the situation as:

- Innovation in pockets. Lack of corporately led and owned innovation; no culture of risk taking.
- Need to be open to learning from good practice both inside and outside the council.
- Need to learn from and share innovative practices and creative approaches across services.

Performance management and planning were the next aspects that the Review highlighted as needing action. Here, it stated that

- a clear corporate planning and performance framework is needed.
- there is a need to define a clear planning framework that will deliver agreed priorities.
- a robust performance management process is needed to support this planning process.
- performance data on key priorities, targets and financial information is needed regularly and be used to identify where performance is slipping and action is needed to remedy the problem.

The next aspect identified by the Review was a need for people management and a human resources strategy. In this aspect, it identified the following areas:

- internal communications needs urgently to improve
- the human resources strategy to be used as a lever for changes in people management to include the following areas: rapid changes to internal communication;

project management training for all managers and relevant staff; prioritising action on staff issues in the MacPherson action plan.

The need for equalities was yet another aspect needing attention as per the Review which saw the need for action at two levels:

- There are perceptions by some staff that parts of the council are male dominated.
- Some black workers also feel strongly that serious changes are needed in some departments.

The final aspect highlighted by the Review was services to customers, stating that services to customers needed to be a higher corporate priority and that change was needed to frontline service delivery as well as in management style and structure.

Strategic change for better outcomes for the public

The Library Service in Merton started an organisational review of the service with a view to develop a new vision and staffing structure to bring about changes to ensure that the Service was able to meet new demands placed on it – including the challenges posed by the IDeA Review. A number of publications listed in References, particularly in Durrani and Smallwood (2006), provide a comprehensive coverage of the way changes were planned in Merton. The key issues addressed by the Review were:

- Equality, policy, research.
- “Traditional” and “innovations” aspects.
- Planning and performance management.
- Innovations and development.
- Targeted outreach: Youth, Older People, ethnic minorities etc.
- Partnerships and staff development.

The challenge for Merton Libraries was to bring about change along the lines of progressive librarianship while the conservative structures and thinking still dominated the service. The process of change was initiated from the top – by decision makers at the Council level. In essence, the library service was attempting to move from a conservative service to a progressive one. It would not be correct to say that suddenly Merton Libraries had become a domain of progressive librarianship. Conservatism had been deeply entrenched and was not easy to overcome. However, external conditions were changing and there was recognition among senior decision makers in the Council that change of direction was essential. The internal dynamics supporting and direction was also in place, with the appointment of a new, progressive-minded team at the top. Gradually, this progressive team planned a new strategy and won over many middle and lower level of staff to their way of thinking. Thus in the ups and downs of the battle between the conservative and progressive trends, the period examined in this book reflects the dominance of the progressive one. It was fortunate for Merton that one of the new members of the Senior Library Management Team was in contact with academics at the London Metropolitan University, particularly its Management Research Centre (MRC). This introduced to Merton Libraries advantages from the academic as well as management thought and practice. These influenced the new staffing structure, the new innovations project approach and guidance for the Quality Leaders Project. In addition, an MBA (Executive) student at the MRC used Merton as a case study for her MBA Dissertation.⁵³

Here is perhaps a lesson for progressive librarianship. Too often, library policy and practice remains isolated from other academic areas, and becomes centred entirely on a rather narrow definition of the librarianship profession. It then lacks creative stimulus from related and relevant academic and management fields whose positive developments are then not transferred to library work. Merton managed to avoid this disadvantage with its close relationship with MRC.

⁵³ Naila Durrani whose thesis was entitled "How can strategic change be achieved for better outcomes for the public? A case study of Merton Library and Heritage Service (1998-1999). Dissertation, MBA, 1979/99. London Metropolitan University.

Moving from a conservative to a progressive service

The need for and the prospect of bringing about meaningful change was highlighted by the Assistant Director, Leisure and Libraries:

Merton's library service had great difficulty in confronting any sort of change in society. The previous Head had been there since the age of 18 and was not going to challenge what she had grown up in. It was a 'reactive service' and any new components were 'add-ons' rather than part of a 'pro-active fundamental re-orientation of the service'. (Quoted by Durrani, Naila, 1999)

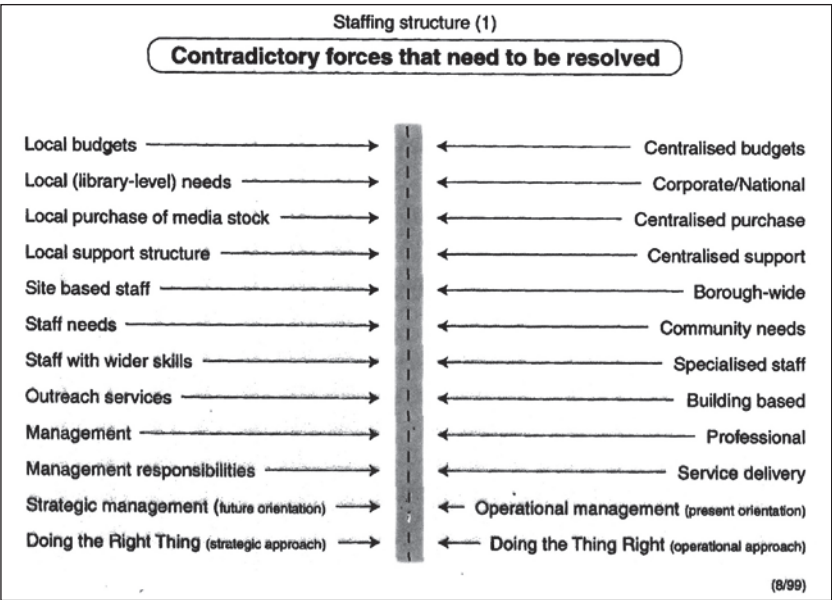
Thus an important requirement for bring about change in Merton to get progressive leadership in post. This was achieved with new appointments to the posts of Assistant Director for Leisure and Libraries, Head of Library and Heritage Service and the Principal Librarian for Customer and Community Service. The foundation for a progressive approach was thus laid.

Merton Libraries also accepted the recommendations contained in the dissertation by Durrani, N. (1999). These included the following: ways of addressing resistance from middle management; the appointment of a Transition Manager whose role would be "to ensure that implementation is taking place and smoothening the path for change implementation." This was to ensure "that covert delays and undermining of project implementation are not happening, but also to reduce the pressures on top management so that they can concentrate more on strategy and political aspects". Another recommendation was to build "coalition for change" in order to disrupt the "coalition of vested interests and the status quo". Yet another recommendation was to stabilise or institutionalise change: "it is very important for Merton to institutionalise pilot innovations or projects which are successful so as not to lose the wider and long term benefits of success in individual projects". She also suggested ways of dealing with "resistance from users in catchment areas of libraries under 'closure option'" and "getting the support of the public and politicians on the changes to reduce resistance at a later stage". Developing better channels of communication with staff and the public also featured high among the recommendations.

The following section looks at the implementation of the new programme at Merton.

The report, *A Strategy for Library and Heritage Services* was agreed by the Leisure and Libraries Services Committee on April 1, 1998 (London Borough of Merton, 1998). The Report set up a Review Steering Group to chart a new strategy for the Services. The Review “is set in the context of various Government initiatives and the role libraries can play in the wider communities they serve”.

Under the larger Review Group, there was a library-based planning group which came up with suggested changes. As a first step, the Merton planning team sought to understand the forces that supported and those that opposed change as well as those that were initially uncommitted to either side but could be won over for progressive change. This understanding of the internal contradictions within the system was summarised in the following “contradictions chart”:



47: Contradictory forces at Merton Libraries (1993)

Each aspect of this chart needed to be understood in all its complexities and a point of balance needed to be found for each opposing tendency. The initial decisions reached were then communicated

clearly to staff whose views were sought for incorporation in the final programme of change. It should be understood that the senior managers gave a clear indication that the *status quo* was not an option, so that any changes suggested would need to meet the new vision and criteria developed on the basis of meeting new and unmet needs of *all* members of the public, meeting government requirements as well as the IDeA Review recommendations mentioned earlier. The overall perspective was to move from the conservative to a progressive model and the extent of how far the changes would go would be decided on the basis of support from Council's elected members and Council executives. Indeed among the first steps taken by the Review Group was to discuss the proposed changes with Council executives, local authority political leaders and with local trade unions. All three were in general agreement with the proposed direction of change. It should also be noted that the Review Group included representatives of elected political parties running the Council or in opposition. Thus the Review group ensured that it had the required political support. It also had support from the Council executives in the form of the Deputy Chief Executive who was in agreement with the direction of the proposed changes. The third important group whose support was essential was the trade unions, representing staff interests. They were also positive as the review proposed no staff redundancies and instead provided additional training and development opportunities for staff to be funded by a special European Social Fund (ESF) grant from the European Union. The Review Group had earlier applied for these funds with the support of relevant Council Departments and had then worked out a staff training programme with the Management Research Centre of the London Metropolitan University.

An important lesson for progressive librarianship was that there existed a high level of progressive views and directives in government policies and in national and local requirements to take the progressive approach forward. In many cases this was no more than rhetoric, but it did enable the Review Group to show government policy support for its progressive approach. This helped at the level of getting local political as well as professional support.

However, the Review Group realised that a conservative review group could easily have taken the review forward in a totally opposite direction, with various progressive-sounding slogans to make it appear

that it met national and professional requirements. Thus which group, progressive or conservative, had power to make change was a crucial factor. In the case of Merton, it was the progressive librarianship that was in control.

Communities developing communities

The Review Group set a new vision for the service. It was decided to place the needs of the local community at the centre of everything that the library service did. A new social role of the Service was then to be found in this context. Smallwood (2002a) provides further details on this approach, explaining the role of the service in the process. Her chart is reproduced below to show the approach. The innermost circle, she explains, places community needs at the centre of the service. But first she defines the term "community development" as used in the Merton Review:

The process by which we provide opportunities for empowerment by enabling communities to access the information, knowledge and skills necessary to satisfy their needs.

Smallwood (2002a) explains the significance of some of the terms used in the definition:

There are several key words here - empowerment, enabling, access and needs. People must feel empowered to take up the services that libraries offer, if development is to take place. Libraries can provide opportunities for empowerment, by enabling access. Simply providing the services is not enough. Libraries must be proactive in enabling access, if they are to truly provide opportunities for empowerment.

She then explains the next circle:

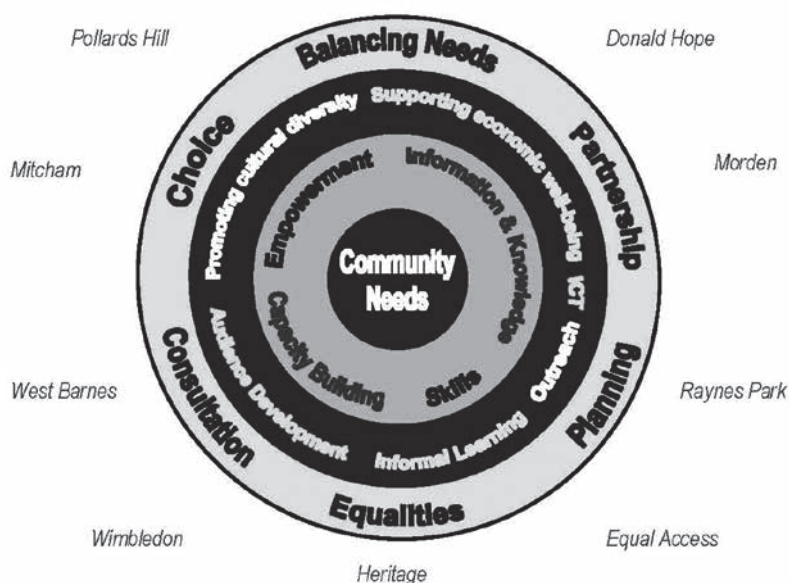
Although particular needs may vary from community to community, we have identified several key needs that we think are common to all communities, particularly communities that need/could benefit from development. These are information and knowledge; skills; empowerment and capacity building.

Smallwood (2002a) continues the circles story:

The next part of the model, therefore, is the “how” circle – how might we respond to community needs in a library service delivery context. We have identified six key areas in how we might respond to need: outreach, promoting cultural diversity, audience development, ICT, supporting economic well-being, informal learning.

The final circle identifies the guiding principles which “must underpin all aspects of service delivery”: partnership, choice, consultation, planning, balancing needs and equalities. Smallwood (2002a) concludes:

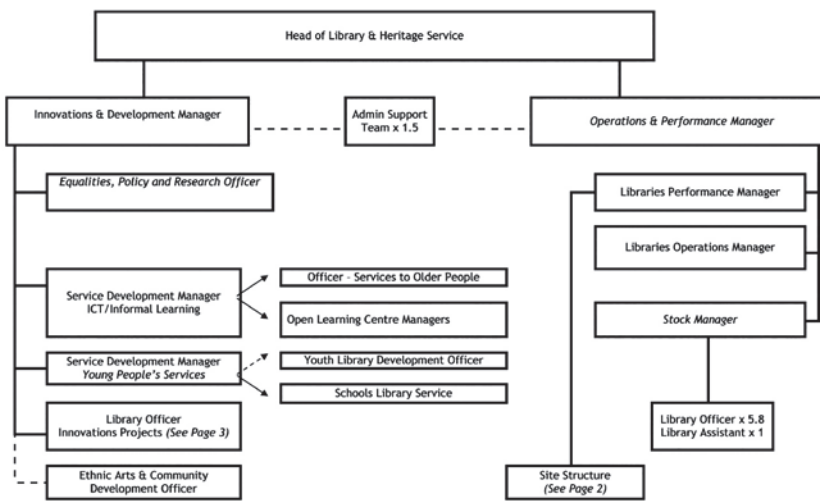
In bringing the strategic objectives together in this model, we feel that we have devised the beginning of a strategy that can help to put Merton’s libraries at the heart of its communities. By focusing on community needs and by being at the heart of the community, libraries can be a dynamic force for social change.



48: Needs based library service chart (Smallwood) 2003

Thus began the long process of putting ideas into action. The next stage was to create an appropriate staffing structure which could deliver the vision contained in the new community needs-based approach. The new 2003 staffing structure addressed these concerns as well as various professional issues. An important aspect of the new structure was an emphasis on innovations. But this was not meant to provide wholesale innovation which could put the entire system into an experimental mode, with the possibility of it all going wrong. The approach, recommended by the Management Research Centre, was to use pilot projects to try out new ideas on a small scale, with a small number of committed staff members dedicated to developing new services with community support. This, it was reasoned, was a better way of bringing about change. Successful innovations could then be expanded to encompass the entire service and become the mainstream. Any failures could also be discarded without affecting the entire service.

The new staffing chart is reproduced below. It shows the service with two distinct, but related aspects: operations and performance management on the one hand and innovation and development on the other. This structure was amended to meet changing circumstances in 2003. Underpinning the new structure were a number of concerns which were examined by Durrani and Smallwood (2004).



49: Merton's staffing structure with Innovations wing (2003)

The 2003 staffing structure was used to address some challenges thrown up by the 2000 structure. The structure was influenced by a number of priorities and principles, including the need to meet the requirements of DCMS's Framework for the Future (2003). The aim was to produce a "balanced" structure which would resolve a number of contradictions that existed in the public library scene in Britain, the key one being between maintaining a traditional, building-based service while developing the service in new directions and reaching out to those not using the service currently. Its key points can be summarised as:

1. Focus on a "needs-based" service to put resources (staff, media fund etc.) where the needs are greatest or unmet.
2. Focus on policy – to address the policy vacuum which made it difficult to work on budgets, service delivery, equality etc. as there were no clear, consistent and coherent written guidelines as to what the service should be doing.
3. Focus on performance management – to ensure that policies, once formulated, were implemented and corrective action taken if they are not followed.
4. The staffing structure's two aspects provided an approach which made it possible to make improvements in current service while developing new services. This was to reduce the tension between the "traditional" library service and a "development through innovations" approach of a progressive library service.
5. A number of new posts were created as a way of meeting new challenges and bringing in new skills to the service. These include:
 - "Innovations & Development Manager" and "Innovations Project Officer": to ensure that new ideas and creativity had appropriate management support.
 - "Equality, Policy and Research Officer" – ensure (1) equality was at the heart of all work; (2) everything the service did was driven by a policy-approach, particularly issues around equality.

- “Operations & Performance Manager” (supported by “Libraries Performance Manager” and “Libraries Operations Manager”) – to ensure an operations and performance management focus – in effect to ensure that the “traditional” service operates efficiently while ensuring that new services developed in the Innovations & Development wings are mainstreamed as part of the “normal” library service.
- Two Service Development Manager posts to ensure services in the following areas were not only maintained, but developed, in keeping with new needs and requirements: services to young people and services associated with informal learning and ICT.
- “Youth Library Development Officer” – a joint post with Merton’s Youth Service. This was an attempt to bring new youth-work skills in libraries while consolidating a new partnership with Youth Service as a way of delivering a joined-up Council service to young people.
- “Officer, Services to Older People” - joint post with Merton’s Chief Executive’s Department and the Merton Association of Pensioners. A new partnership approach to develop services to older people, including implementing the Action Plan developed as part of the Council-wide Best value Review of services to older people.
- New manager posts for new externally-funded project.

The innovation projects chart (below) indicates internal and external partners in developing new services. Such partnerships were a crucial part of the new approach.

At the same time, the basic principles underpinning the new structure are not obvious at a casual look at the structure. These were the aspects that distinguished the previous conservative service from the developing progressive one. An important requirement

for developing progressive services was the need for research and evidence-based approach in bringing about change. Progressive librarians need to be aware that the conservative approach has a vast resource base in terms of ideas and personnel who have had the time and resources over many years to embed their outlook and approach in the minds of managers, communities, politicians and Council executives. The progressive librarians do not have this ready-made material to fall back on and need to produce documents on new ideas and practices even as they are developing a new service. This was the case in Kenya as well as in Hackney. Merton was no exception. Although the earlier experiences certainly informed the latter ones, it was still necessary to develop and adopt ideas to the new situation in each new area being developed. There thus need to have a dedicated group of committed people, preferably with professional background, but with a totally radical approach to policy and other aspects of the on-going tasks. This was available in Kenya, in Hackney and now in Merton. Without this level of committed, clear-thinking progressive people, no progress could be made.

In the case of Merton, the innovation and development aspect of the staffing structure brought together and developed such a group of managers and staff who became, in effect agents of change. The Quality Leaders, being developed as part of the QLP (Youth) project also fulfilled such a role. This dedicated team brought in an entirely new approach. Experience in Hackney had shown that progress can be limited if an appropriate staffing structure is not developed to implement new visions, ideas and practices. Many of the changes in the restructure can be seen as aspects of progressive librarianship as they are absent in the conservative library service. This group of “new” managers produced a large body of internal documents which provide in-depth information about the process and substance of changes in Merton. These included policy documents, information newsletter and discussion papers as well as notes for staff and managers for extensive set of meetings. There is a wealth of information in these documents for future historians to understand the reality of the almost revolutionary changes that took place there.

The following section looks at some of the key aspects of the new approach which provide ideas and action which are the points of departure from the previous conservative service.

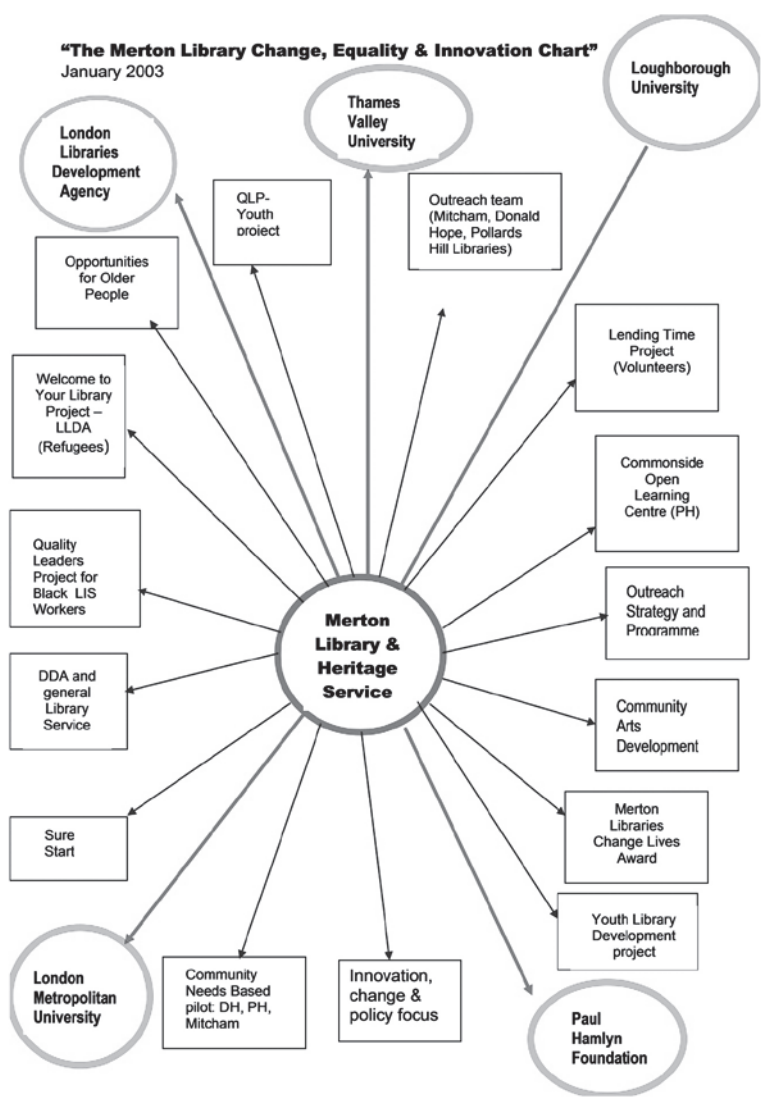
Needs-based service

Key among the changes in Merton was the development of a needs-based service. The start of the process was the “needs-based” chart mentioned earlier. Once having developed a vision, the next step was to see how it could be implemented. The main approach was the development of a number of strategic partnerships. This approach had various advantages. First, expenses would be saved as two or more partners would share costs. It would also enable staff to acquire new skills developed in devising and delivering new services.

Policy approach

Merton Libraries, in common with many others in England, had a deficit of written policies, resulting in uneven services between different areas of needs in the community as well as different levels and quality of service between sites. Decisions were made by senior staff in charge of budgets to suit their own perspectives and outlooks. In effect, this reinforced the traditional library service and made any change extremely difficult. Progressive librarians involved in the Merton programme realised that this hold over power by those well-entrenched in the system had to be broken. Their proposal was to start with a set of written policies which were to be agreed by all to ensure their implementation. Once agreed, these would guide all aspects of the service, including the use of resources and development of service as well as issues around empowering staff to influence policies. The first step was the writing of a document on the need of having policies and how the policy approach would work. This essentially guided the new policy approach. Once this had been written and agreed, the first policy to be developed was the Libraries Equalities Policy. Other agreed policy areas for future development were stock/media fund; customer care and services to young people. This approach could not have been started without a key new post created in the new staffing structure, that of Equalities, Policy and Research Officer under the Innovation and Development wing of the structure. It was clear that a new approach needed people with the appropriate skills and outlook, committed to the new vision – and with power to bring about change. This post was considered a key post if the new approach was to have a chance of success.

Innovation projects



50: Merton Library Innovation chart

The aim of the innovation projects was to take a targeted approach to developing library services based on need. Once such projects proved successful in practice, they could then be embedded into mainstream service delivery. Such an approach was a key part of the new staffing

structure which provided organisational structure to develop projects and also for mainstreaming them once successful. This approach enabled the service to break the hold of conservatism on the service and to bring in progressive services and a progressive approach on a gradual basis while creating its own champions among staff and communities to ensure that a strong foundation was built.

The new approach also involved a shift of focus from service provision on the basis of race and ethnicity to one on age while the needs of all age groups were addressed in specified ways. With a mainstreaming equalities approach the aim was to ensure that, within each age group, all equality aspects were addressed e.g. ethnicity, disability, gender etc. This approach, it was felt, would contribute more to community cohesion and reduce the tensions that can exist when one community feels that resources are being directed away from its services to services in a narrow area.

Why and how of Innovation Projects

The transition from a conservative to a progressive library services can often be challenging. In most situations, a total changeover is not possible, given the prevailing culture and system in UK and Kenya. So a gradual approach often works the best, not only in making change possible, but also to convince majority of staff, managers, and indeed politicians, of the merit of the new approach. This was done in the case of Merton through the innovations project approach which had the advantage of plugging gaps in the service and so seemed reasonable and acceptable to all. What was not seen at the time was the gradual qualitative change that the success of the projects could bring. The approach could lead to the change in the entire system and had the potential to become "the mainstream".

It is thus useful to take a brief look at the projects to see that they aimed to do and how. The main idea was to develop projects for those sections of the population not served, or not served adequately, by the conservative service. As mentioned earlier, the previous approach was to target services by race and ethnicity factors, but this was considered divisive and not targeting to real needs, as many people thus targeted were adequately served by the service anyway, or did not need additional support. Thus in the previous system, one group

not served was working class. In the innovations project approach, the target rules were changed to take on board issues around age and class so that all young people – across race and class spectrums – were included.

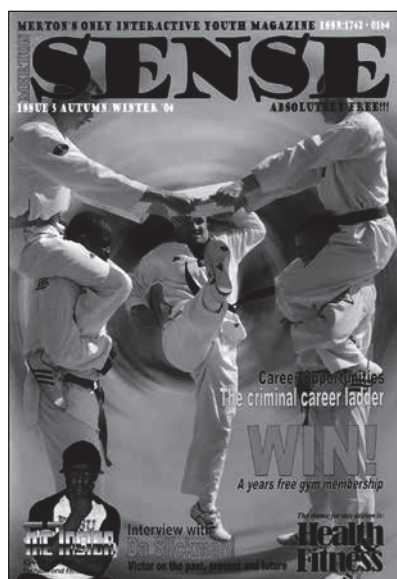
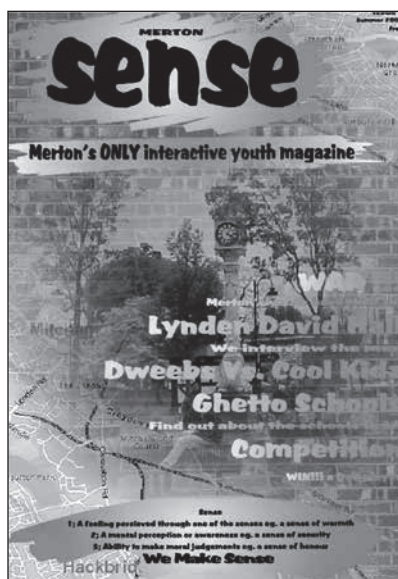
Below are some details of the innovation projects that were set up.

Services to Older People

Following the completion of the Best Value Review of Opportunities for Older People by the Merton Council, Merton libraries joined forces with the Chief Executive's Department and the Merton Association of Pensioners to create the post of an Officer for Services to Older People in the library service. The post holder was to spend 50% of time focused on developing library services to older people and 50% of time working on the Council Review's Action Plan for Services to Older People. Part of this work involved supporting the "Senior Merton" group and working for the Merton Association of Pensioners several hours per week, supporting their work. The post was managed by Merton libraries.

Youth Library Development Project

Following on from the corporate focus on youth, as well as the findings of the Audit Commission that youth are increasingly moving away from library use (Audit Commission, 2002), Merton Libraries recognised the need to engage with young people in terms of developing more relevant library services for them. It developed a number of strands designed to improve services to young people. These include the production of *Merton Sense*, a magazine for and by young people and the setting up of "Youth Space" in the Innovations Unit in partnership with Youth Service as well as the establishment of the "Library Youth Forum." These were part of the development of the Quality Leaders Project (Youth) explained later.



51: Merton Sense (Nos. 1 & 5)

Welcome to Your Library (refugees & asylum seekers)

Merton Libraries was one of five London boroughs involved in the Welcome to Your Library Project, which was funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and managed by the London Libraries Development Agency. The aim of this Project was to develop new, and improve any existing, services to refugees and asylum seekers. As part of the project Merton had one part time Project Officer. The Project won the CILIP "Libraries Change Lives" Award in 2001.

Smallwood (2002b) explains the strands of the project:

- There were two strands to this [the Refugee Resource Collection and Service]:
- Visits to Merton Asylum Welcome to introduce asylum seekers to library service, to the local library itself and to the wealth of information available here.
- Visits to groups with high numbers of refugees who, although at varying degree of settlement within Merton, still have specific information needs.

Smallwood (2002b) goes on to explain the links of the Refugee Project with other projects in Merton:

We are developing our work with refugees and asylum seekers through a number of other projects:

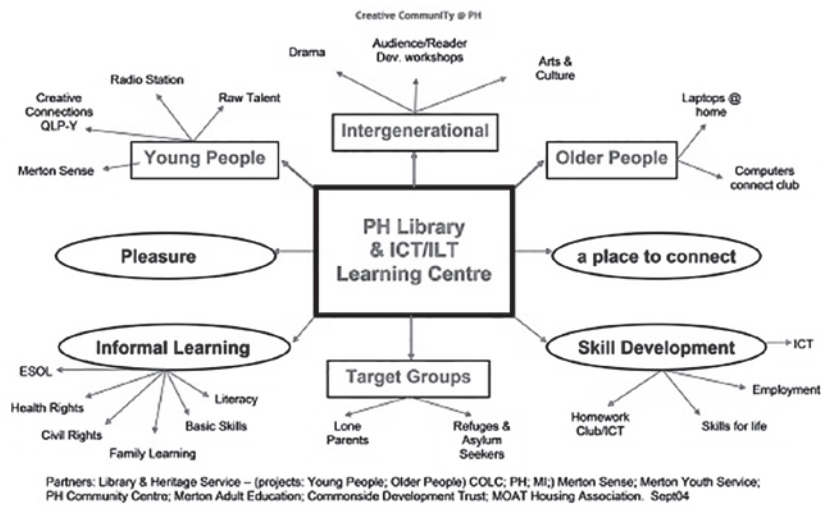
- The Lending Time Project – focusing on using volunteers to add value to library services.
- London Library Development Agency “Welcome to your Library” Project ... to develop services to refugees and asylum seekers.
- Merton’s “Communities Developing Communities” approach ... furthering community development by empowering communities to develop themselves.

Smallwood (2002b) then explains the planned approach to all these projects which were not just “things in themselves”, unconnected with other developments around them and also the strategic approach in developing services:

Winning the award has certainly helped us focus our thinking along more strategic lines. We have now developed a more strategic approach so that the operational focus is accompanied by a strategic one. It is vitally important, we feel, to mainstream the needs of refugees and asylum seekers, as it is to mainstream all issues around social exclusion.

This approach points to a number of key areas developed by the progressive library approach in Merton. First, it emphasised the need to develop a strategic approach and a vision to “mainstream all issues around social exclusion”. The other important point was to find a balance between strategic and operational aspects so that each reinforces the other. This approach provides another dividing line between progressive and conservative librarianship, with the latter often focussing on the operational aspect to the detriment of the strategic one.

Commonside Open Learning Centre



52: Pollards Hill Library’s community Library (2004)

Based at Pollards Hill Library, the Commonsides Open Learning Centre (funded by the New Opportunities Fund) aimed to encourage adults from the local community into learning by ICT. Particular emphasis was placed upon improving access for disadvantaged people and those who, as a result of barriers, have not traditionally taken up learning opportunities. The target groups were lone parents, older people and the wider community living in the local area.

Lending Time Project

Merton Libraries was one of six authorities nationwide to be involved in the Lending Time Pilot Project. This project was funded by the DCMS and Active Community Unit of the Home Office and was managed by the Community Service Volunteers (CSV). Its aim was to use volunteers to add value to library services and to help deliver new and innovative services. Merton Libraries had a part time Officer working on the Project. In its application to be involved in the project, Merton libraries made it clear that its approach was not to help develop volunteering opportunities for people, but to develop new services and would not involve any volunteers doing the work of library staff.



55: QLP News No. 6 (2008)



56: QLP News No. 8 (2008)

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation awarded £180,000, and the National Youth Agency £20,000, to Merton Library and Heritage Service and the Quality Leaders Project (QLP) Steering Group to develop innovative services to youth, with special emphasis on young refugees and asylum seekers. The QLP-Youth Project refocused public library services so that young people themselves would decide on the services they needed. In this way services to young people were being mainstreamed. The QLP-Y model, which was based on the idea of *management development through service development*, also developed new skills among project staff so that they could develop and deliver new and innovative services to young people. Merton was one of seven authorities participating in the youth-orientated strand of the project (QLP-Y) which started in December 2003.⁵⁴ The Project was further developed at the London Metropolitan University when a key person behind the Project moved there in 2005. Further details are given later in the book.

⁵⁴ Further details about QLP are available at <http://www.seapn.org.uk/qlp.html>.

Moving beyond pilot projects

While each project was successful in its own context and helped to overcome initial reservations among some managers, the challenge was to take the approach for the service as a whole. This was one of the aims of the Projects approach. This “whole-service” approach was implemented at Pollards Hill Library in a way which brought all the projects within the scope of one library, thereby creating an entirely new model of service while setting a new standard for library service. It was proposed that if this approach worked at the Pollards Hill Library, it would be extended in stages to the other libraries.

The Pollards Hill Library was located in an area of greater social and economic needs. The project was entitled the *Creative CommuNITy @ Pollards Hill Library* and started with several meetings with local communities to assess needs and possibilities. This redefined the purpose of the library, its relations with its local communities and other people working in the community, such as health, education, housing and social services. All those involved in providing local services of relevance to the information and learning role of the library were brought together in the project. This helped to re-define the social role of the library in meeting people’s needs as described in the “community development” approach explained earlier by Smallwood (2002). In this way, innovation was used to meet the needs of all people – including those currently excluded. Services were defined for different age groups, different minority groups, different interest-groups such as single mothers and refugees.

The key areas that distinguish this model from the conservative model are service approach and the content. Thus the role of the library is defined as (marked in blue in the Chart) pleasure, informal learning, skills development and a place to connect with ideas, people, learning and knowledge. This is then put into practice based on community needs as defined by a community profile developed earlier in the process: services to young people, services to older people, and a particularly important inter-generational service. The community profile was used to identify special interest groups such as lone parents and refugees and asylum seekers. Within each group the specific service to be delivered was devised in close consultation with the group members themselves to ensure the relevance and the real needs decided upon

by themselves, not by the library service which provided professional and managerial input into the entire exercise. Finally, the role of local partnerships was crucial to make it a “whole-community” approach.

Following the initial meetings with local community organisations, the Library decided that all the innovation projects already established on a Borough-wide basis had a role to play in this model. This involved the Innovation and Development wing, with its projects, including services to young people, services to older people, refugee and asylum services, and volunteering services. Key part was to be played by the *Merton Sense* youth group which had by then established itself as the voice of young people in Merton.

Local community groups that were involved included the Pollards Hill Community Centre, Moat Housing Association, and Commonsides Development Trust. Council services involved included Merton Adult Education and Merton Youth Service. Education and Social Services were also represented. In all this, the library service played a crucial, central role of bringing all the partners together and developing a new service based at the local library.

There was an essential element that ran through all the activities: the use of information and communications technology (ICT). This was an extension of the Commonsides Open Learning Centre which was run by the library service for over four years. It was felt that libraries have an essential role in making ICT skills and opportunities available to local people. The approach used was the provision of ICT skills in its own right, but more important, as essential part of all the other activities taking place.

The whole picture then got completed when the traditional library service was added to the above scene. While the Pollards Hill Library had generally developed a community approach in the previous few years, the above approach was meant to give a qualitative leap. It has also decided to include the larger Mitcham Library in the new approach. It shared many of local features of the Pollards Hill area, so that all services were to be tried out from the two libraries. Successful aspects would then be taken up at other libraries in the Borough.

A key requirement for progressing this project successfully was the development of staff and managers to take on new roles and responsibilities. The new staffing structure had already allowed for this by creating a number of staff development proposals:

1. The Ideas Forum (“a place to think”) – regular meetings of managers and staff to introduce new ideas and practices from within and outside Merton and to keep up with professional developments and learn from other experiences.
2. Staff Development Unit (SDU). Planned to have been developed at the same time as the new Innovations Unit, but implementation was delayed because of various operational issues caused by resistance to change from some senior managers.

This “whole-library” approach was to provide experience in a “learning and testing” approach to develop an alternative model of delivering services.

While this approach showed much promise, it was not allowed to continue. Some senior managers left the service and the new leadership was not in sympathy with the progressive approach. Under the process of a new staffing structure, to be implemented in 2005, the entire “innovation and development” approach shown in the 2000 staffing structure was eliminated. Although some aspects of the previous innovation model were retained for a while, they become meaningless without the overall structure and vision embedded in the previous structure.

Thus the pioneering *Merton Sense* youth magazine and youth project itself faced closure; the Creative CommuniTY project, which showed so much promise and saw much enthusiasm and support from local communities, was allowed to disappear through the deletion of various posts that provided essential vision and leadership in its development; the key post of Equality, Policy and Research Officer which was to be the engine for change, was deleted. In all these changes, the development of new leadership carefully nurtured over a five-year period was being jettisoned and the innovation projects officers are gradually being sucked into providing a “conservative” library service. Far from developing staff, this approach was demotivating, deskilling and demoralising for the skilled leaders who had shown much promise as future leaders. Innovation has come to be seen as “luxury” which the service seems not to be able to afford. The real question remains – can public libraries survive without such innovation?

An important reason for lack of sustainability of the new approach in Merton was that local communities did not have sufficient democratic power to guide their local services. Thus they had not been fully integrated in the library change process. They were thus not in a position to defend their services when the new approach, new services and structures were under threat or abandoned altogether as the conservative service re-asserted itself when the political and social conditions changed.

Another issue that needs to be examined is the whole approach to bringing about change. As a result of resistance from some staff and some senior managers, it was decided in Merton to bring about change through pilot projects which could bring about innovation and change in specific areas which could then be expanded. A better approach perhaps might have been to bring about overall change at once when the political and the library situation was positive for change and the progressive people had power to do so. The weakness lay in a lack of total commitment of senior library managers to force through change and confront resistance to change when it was still weak.

In the final analysis, the factor that played a crucial role in the “defeat” of the innovations approach was resistance from powerful senior managers who used their historical control over power structures, over resources and over some middle managers and some key staff to ensure that the new services and vision were defeated at every level – ranging from policy to implementation. Institutional racism and entrenched inequality also played their part. All this meant that the energy of those leading the change had to be diverted into petty organisational battles rather than focusing on pushing on with change.

Key issues

That there is a need for change in the public libraries in Britain has been recognised at local and central government level for some time. It is increasingly being accepted in the public library sector itself now. The urgent need is to find answers to the questions “are libraries open to all?” and “open for what?” There is an on-going debate about what libraries are all about and how best to build relevant public libraries which meet the needs of all communities, groups and individuals who

need their services. A number of different ways have been tried over the years in different authorities. Merton's case is one which combined a strong theoretical approach with innovative practice, based on principles of equality and justice. Over a period of five years or so, major changes took place in Merton Libraries. These were attempts to lay the foundation for a new people-orientated service which had the potential to develop a new, relevant approach to delivering library service to meet the needs of its people in the 21st century.

An important issue that concerns all progressive librarians is sustainability of new progressive services and innovation over the long term. In the case of Merton, none of the above initiatives and the approach itself has survived. This lack of sustainability raises a number of key issues such as availability of effective leadership, having long term vision, setting appropriate priorities, having skills for managing resources and staff for change and equality, and the changing political direction of those making policies and charting organisational vision. There are perhaps lessons here for library schools and Universities as students need to see progressive librarianship as part of the programmes that need to be, and can be, implemented. They need to be equipped with ideas, skills and experiences of progressive librarianship as part of "normal" library studies.

The lesson then is that it is not enough to have a great vision, appropriate policies and plans. Equally necessary is total commitment and support from senior managers who should be able and willing to use their power to ensure that meaningful and long lasting change takes place. Lack of leadership at that level proved decisive. The nature of conservatism also needs to be understood fully as it lies low when it is weak and reasserts itself when new senior managers with conservative ideas re-empower conservatism. Perhaps progressive librarians also need to learn to lie low when weak in numbers but develop strategies to re-emerge when conditions change.

The experience in Hackney showed the limits of progressive library practices. It was only when there was a combination of favourable factors that initiatives such as the TCLC and BSG could take place. These factors included active support from those in power at the Council level which again was dependent to a certain extent on the political climate in the country as a whole. It also needed local support at library and Departmental level. In order to make these two factors

effective, a third requirement was a strong organisation such as the BWG which provided not only the “muscle” power but also the ideas and vision which those in power could support. At a professional level, such organisations need to take up issues about what progressive librarianship meant. It also needed certain political skills to ensure that the balance of power within and outside the library service supported progressive ideas, amongst senior management and among staff.

The key issue

The key issue facing local authorities is to bring about changes in services which have remained more or less static in a rapidly changing world. The experience from Hackney and Merton indicates that change can come from a new kind of leadership with a vision and drive to create a new type of relevant, inclusive and “equal” service for all people. While such leadership is not widely available now, the experience in both the cases shows that it is possible to develop it from the ranks of the middle management who normally remain largely powerless to make effective change, and whose effective leadership skills have not been fully developed.

It is thus clear that a key task for progressive librarianship is to develop new staff, managers and professionals so that they emerge as future leaders with a new vision and commitment. They need to break away from the mind-set created by many present “leaders” and from the prevailing ethos which has refused to change – except in words. The Hackney-Merton experiences show that there is a layer of middle managers who are not only ready for change, but are actively supporting it. But in many cases, their attempts are thwarted by many of those who hold power in the system, who are often afraid of losing their positions of power and influence, and who cannot face the challenge posed by new ideas from a new generation. Some others may lack knowledge, confidence or commitment to bring about meaningful change. Yet they have no solutions to the many challenges facing libraries today. They are also active in stopping the empowerment of local communities to influence their local services. They have become the greatest obstacle to the normal development of a new generation of leadership as well as for developing relevant services which are open to all.

It is also important to realise that there is a powerful group of “conservative” managers who hold enormous power through having survived in the system over long periods. They rule by patronage, hierarchy and intimidation, installing fear, but no respect. They are extremely successful in scuppering any progressive ideas, having learnt bureaucratic tricks to thwart any change they do not agree with. The prevailing mode in public libraries in Britain is “Middle class, white and English values”, according to Muddiman, Dave *et al.* (2000). Drastic surgery is needed if the very values underpinning public libraries are to change.

And yet, these two experiences point to the possibility of a very positive outcome in local services *if* appropriate measures are taken. There has been tremendous enthusiasm and commitment from those involved in the various projects in Hackney and Merton, as well as from those involved in the various phases of the Quality Leader Project. This enthusiasm needs to be supported from all those committed to developing services to meet the needs of all. Success can come if strategic partnerships are built within library service and local authority as a whole, and perhaps more important, with community groups to bring about change. Support of elected Members committed to organisational change can be a crucial element where resistance to change is the greatest.

At the same time, there are key lessons which the Government needs to take on board. While the approach of bringing about gradual change through persuasion may be an important way of ensuring that everybody is on board, this approach is not likely to lead to any meaningful change during the lifetimes this or next generation. Libraries, and local authorities as a whole, do not have that much time left – they are likely to be swallowed by forces unleashed by globalisation and rules from WTO, even as arguments rage about the best way of bringing about change. The relaxation of regulation pushed by the conservative finance and corporate establishment has already brought the global financial system to its knees and pushed many countries and peoples to dire poverty. It is the same lack of control and regulation which is also proving the near-death of public libraries as profits of the few takes prominence in all aspects of life at the expense of services to the many.

What is perhaps needed is the declaration of a “state of emergency” to save local services in the interest of local communities. The former

Secretary of State was right when she identified the need for change in public libraries – and by implication in all public service. Her desire to see libraries “become, once again, central points in local communities” (Jowell, 2004) will not be fulfilled unless a new leadership is born in the very struggle for change. Many information workers are daily involved in this struggle to bring about the change that the people need and demand. Yet they are on their own in the battlefield, fighting an army of managers and power-holders who are armed with weapons supplied by the Government itself on behalf of corporate and financial interests. It is about time that national Government “disarms” these power brokers and instead “arm” those who are active in creating a new information service. Change and innovation need to be legitimised in local authorities. Those in power need to be made accountable in a real way to their communities. It is necessary to ensure that creativity, equality and empowerment of communities and staff happen in practice, not only on paper. After 150 years of public library service, there is a need to give a new legitimacy to an alternative information service. There is an urgent need for alternate effective leadership. New ideas, new vision and new structures are needed if local authorities are to meet the needs of a new world.

The lesson of people’s struggles around the world is that in the long run, people will create systems that answer their needs. There is a clear role that librarians need to play in this march to progress and development.

National and international initiatives

Some initiatives in public libraries at two London Boroughs – Hackney and Merton – have been examined so far. However, the progressive library initiatives were not restricted to these two libraries. While they were going on, a number of other initiatives were also taking place. In a sense, all these were different ways in which those involved were attempting to develop progressive librarianship activities, and laying a firmer national foundation for these initiatives. A brief look at some of these follows. It should however be noted that the ones covered in this book were not the only progressive activities taking place in the country. Perhaps more studies such as this one need to be carried out to bring them to greater prominence.

No change at the Library Association (CILIP)

One area in which the progressive library movement tried to make the profession more progressive was to make the professional body move a little from its comfort zone. But changing a body so well established in its conservatism as the Library Association (LA), now the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) was no easy matter. A number of attempts were made to influence the body through its Equal Opportunities sub-Committee and also through its newly formed Diversity Group, but to no great impact.

Perhaps the most radical attempt was to try to get the body to be responsive to issues around race and class. While it had paid some attention to some aspects of equality such as gender and race, this was by no means adequate. Moreover, it had not even acknowledged that the profession had anything to do with classes, class contradictions and class struggles – or indeed with politics of information.

While there had been a number of such attempts, here we look at two resolutions proposed for adoption at the LA Annual Conference in 2004. These dealt with issues of race and class, two areas in which the professional body has remained weak to this day. As the *Library Association Record* notes, two Motions on race and class were submitted to the LA Annual General Meeting held on October 23, 1996. These read as follows:

Motion 8

Due notice having been given in accordance with bylaw 61, the following motion will be presented: 'Issues of race and class are as relevant and important to the library community as they are to society at large. A well-attended meeting of Black library workers held at the LA in April revealed that the Association needs to be proactive in its recruitment of these workers and that those who are already members should be encouraged to be more involved in LA activities. We therefore call upon this AGM to recommend to Council: (1) that the LA establishes a formal Black Library Workers Group, which will have the same status (capitation, Council members, etc., as other LA groups); (2) that the LA organises an annual conference for Black Library Workers; (3) that the Black Library Workers Group is allocated a regular column in the *Library Association Record* or quarterly supplement to the LAR. The contents of this column/supplement will be edited by the Equal Opportunities Sub-Committee.'

Proposed: Mr Shiraz Durrani (Mbr No.0039636)

Seconded: Mr John Pateman (Mbr No.0032146)

Motion 9

Due notice having been given in accordance with bylaw 61, the following motion will be presented: 'Public library research indicates that there is a link between social class, deprivation and library usage. We therefore call upon this AGM to recommend to Council: (1) that social class is included in the LA's Equal Opportunity Statement and supporting literature; (2) that the LA issue a guidance note on social class, similar to those on sexual orientation, older people, etc.; (3) that the LA commission further research into the usage and non-usage of libraries by social class.'

Proposed: Mr John Pateman (Mbr No.0032146)

Seconded: Mr Shiraz Durrani (Mbr No.0039636)

It should not come as a surprise that the motions were defeated at the Conference and the Association continued its blinkered approach, unperturbed by issues that the Motions had raised.

Parliamentary Committee submissions

Besides attempting to make the professional body more responsive to the changing social and economic conditions, there was also a move to submit memoranda to various Parliamentary Committees in the hope that alternative perspectives could reach the profession through the legislative process. Two such submissions are mentioned below. The first was a Memorandum submitted to the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport in 2000 (Culture, Media and Sport, Select Committee, 2000). The Memorandum noted:

2. I am concerned that current public library service does not provide adequately for Black⁵⁵ communities.
3. I am also concerned that public libraries do not provide adequately for the needs of the working class.

⁵⁵ The footnote explained the use of the term "Black": The term Black is used in its political sense to include all people from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean and all those who consider themselves Black. It includes those born in Britain but whose parents or grandparents came from Africa, Asia or the Caribbean.

4. It is a regrettable fact that Black Library & Information Services (LIS) workers have not achieved positions of power and influence in the profession. This is not because of lack of academic achievements and commitment on the part of Black LIS workers, but through the existence of institutional racism in the profession. The facts speak for themselves: Bob McKee, the Chief Executive of the Library Association has said that the profession, particularly at senior levels, does not reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of our communities. Only 1.2 per cent of LA members describe themselves as Asian, African or Caribbean—a total of 286 people of whom just three individuals declare a salary of more than £27,000 per year. (Khan, 2000).
5. In spite of the fact that many research reports and inquiries have been undertaken—such as Clough, E and Quarmby, J (1978), Roach, P and Morrison, M (1998), and the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (1999)—no substantive change of direction has taken place in services to Black and working class communities. The excellent standards for local authorities by CRE remain unimplemented.
6. This lack of interest in service to Black communities in the past is shown by the fact that the Report, Library Services for Black and Ethnic Minority Nationalities in the UK was totally ignored in the DNH Review of the Public Library Service in England and Wales (1995).
7. Given commitment and support from the highest level, it is possible to achieve success, as shown for example in Hackney under the Black Stock Group (See Durrani, Pateman and Durrani, 1999). Yet such progress is isolated and not capable of sustainable growth when there is lack of continuing support and commitment from those who hold power—mostly White, petty-bourgeois senior managers who make policies and middle managers who interpret and implement policies.

8. Many projects aimed at improving the position of Black LIS workers and at improving service for Black communities do not receive support and are shifted into a Kafkaesque queue never to see the light of approval.

While the Memorandum was included in the Select Committee's Report, the points it raised were not addressed, nor did it play any part in influencing government policies. The second example was a submission dated November 19, 2004 to Culture, Media and Sport Committee in 2004. Entitled "Create a people-orientated public library service", it took up some themes of concern to progressive librarianship. Key points of the Submission are mentioned below:

The Government's policy on public libraries needs to be informed by the following factors:

Globalisation and effects on libraries

The key issue is to decide what the social role of public libraries is. They should not take the social, economic and political situation they find themselves in as "given", but actively seek to understand why and how we arrived at this situation – and also ensure the public understand it too. It is their role to dig deeper into "facts" that are given to them by their social environment.

British libraries are in danger of using a commercial version of a "global library" much like McDonald restaurant outlets which serve the same product in every part of the world. While this approach may be a useful one in ensuring a standard level of service, and a useful model for maximising profits for the McDonald chain, it is disastrous for libraries if they want to root themselves in their local communities. It is essential that a new model of needs-based library service is developed at policy level and implemented.

For this to happen there is an urgent need for setting up a "public library innovations & development" think-tank with Government support.

Other important changes that need to be considered include the rules developed at the World Trade Organisation, especially in the context of TRIPS (trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights). IFLA has expressed its concerns over TRIPS in a number of areas such as “not for profit libraries”, intellectual property and cultural diversity. Specific threats from these are mentioned by IFLA.⁵⁶

These threats to public libraries need to be considered by the Committee which needs to give a clear direction in ensuring that public libraries remain public in theory and practice and do not become a tool in the hands of a global corporate world for making profits.

Faced with a situation where libraries are blind[ly] walking into extinction, it is important that public libraries stand up for a new role of libraries in society. In the world ruled by corporate globalisation, it is too easy to drift along with the tide of “neutral” librarianship and do nothing to make libraries play a central role in liberating people, their cultures, and their economies from the privatised future that globalisation has planned for them.

A new approach in terms of vision and practice of public librarianship is urgently needed. Real democracy and transparency need to flourish if public libraries are to be at the heart of social life. The Committee needs to give leadership in bringing about these necessary changes.

The myth of “neutrality”

The myth of a “neutral” public library service needs to be exploded. There is no way that libraries and librarians are or can be neutral in the social struggles of their societies. Every decision they make – how much to spend on books, which books to buy, what staff to appoint, how to manage the service – is a reflection of their class position and their

⁵⁶ The IFLA Position on The World Trade Organization (2001). Available at: <http://www.ifla.org/III/clm/pl/wto-ifla.htm#3>.

world outlook, however much they deny this. The power they have been given in running their libraries is supposed to be used to meet the needs of ALL local people. But there is a basic lack of democracy in the world of libraries, which has created “dictator library managers”.

What librarians do – and don’t do – is not merely an academic question. It affects our understanding of our natural and social environment, which, taken in its totality, affects our world outlook, affects what we think and what we do. It influences the minds of the young generation and becomes the prevailing outlook of the adult world of tomorrow.

Manipulation of information, whether conscious or unconscious, is an important matter, not only in local life, but in international relations as well. Librarians can become tools in the hands of those seeking to manipulate whole populations to think along *their* lines – or stand firm to support the democratic rights of the people manipulated. There is no third way here.

Thus there is an urgent need to create new types of people-oriented, democratic libraries and librarians who are directly answerable to the communities they serve.

Libraries and society in Britain

There is usually a time gap between the emergence of a new social reality and that reality being accepted in people’s consciousness. In the case of Britain, changes after the Second World War resulted in the loss of the economic power of Britain, a fact reflected in the loss of the British Empire. However, at a larger social level, the British society has not fully absorbed this fundamental loss of economic and thus political power. Lessons and reality of history are shut out from social consciousness by denying the reality of a new world where Britain is no longer the superpower ruling the world, where China is flexing its muscles to become the most powerful nation in the world.

In a society that has sought to shut out the reality of a new globalised world, it is not surprising that its libraries have shut themselves in a dream world of presumed superiority and “professional” might. The fact that the library world has not come to grips with changes in British society is a reflection of the British society as a whole not coming to grips its new reality.

The Committee needs to give urgent attention to having a reality check of what the current social role of public libraries is and what it ought to be. A greater awareness of the real international and national forces at play in modern society needs to inform public library policy and practice.

Creating a people-orientated library service

There is thus an urgent need to develop a library service that helps to create a new consciousness among people about their real role in society and also about the position of their country in the context of the wider world. Only on such wider awareness can a people-orientated library service be built.

If there is going to be a true people-orientated library service, it is necessary that there is a clear understanding of social forces within which a particular library service operates. Libraries and librarians face a number of challenges today. The first need is for all librarians to investigate their society and communities. Mao’s recommendation at a political level - “no investigation, no right to speak” - is equally valid in the information field. It is important to understand working people’s lives and struggles, be one of them, and then seek ways of creating a relevant library service.

The challenge is to develop a service that is open to all irrespective of class, race, gender, ability, age, sexual orientation, political beliefs, etc. The service needs to be an inclusive one which reaches out to all who are currently excluded. Yet this task is not easy and needs careful thought and planning.

As is the case in all social movements, there are no specific guide books on how to create a liberated, “open” library service. It is only the actual practice of learning from people that will provide a solution that is relevant to our particular social situation and will help us build libraries without walls.

But just learning from people is not enough. The next, and perhaps the more difficult, step is to turn our ideas into action. This is best done by empowering the excluded so that is *they* who decide how our library resources should be used and how our energies are spent. People themselves will then be the best judges of our success or failure. It is in putting these ideas into practice that a people-orientated, “open to all” service can be built.

Libraries can be at the centre of this vastly changing world. Effective leadership in the information field can make libraries places where different social, political and economic forces in conflict can deposit their various views, experiences, knowledge and world outlooks and help create a society at peace with itself. By ensuring that these contradictory forces have an equal chance to be acquired, stored, heard and understood, librarians and libraries can create a new social role for themselves. They will then have played a meaningful social role in creating more just and “equal” societies.

Abdul Kalam, the former President of India, has pinpointed the root cause of social and political conflicts in the world today:

- ... [the] world over, poverty, illiteracy and unemployment are driving forward the forces of anger and violence... But, societies, which includes you and me, have to address themselves to the root causes of such phenomena which are poverty, illiteracy and unemployment.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Kalam, Abdul (2004): “Dynamics of terrorism and violence”. *Philosophy and social action*. Vol. 30 (2) April-June, 2004.

Librarians everywhere have a role to play in eliminating the root causes of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and inequality. It is no longer acceptable for libraries and librarians to refuse to take this social responsibility seriously. The choice is simple: if the information profession does not take its social responsibility seriously, it will no longer have a social role. People will then develop alternative models of information and knowledge communication which do meet their needs. There will then be no libraries as we know them today.

The Committee has an important role in ensuring that public libraries emerge from the deep social sleep into which they have sunk – generally isolated from the people and communities they are expected to serve. There is a further danger of decision makers and managers living in a dream world where regular assurances are given by interested parties that all is well and that libraries are at the centre of social life. The Committee needs to give a clear guidance about the future role of public libraries and help create a totally new mindset needed if we are to save the library for a new generation.

These points, while not addressed by the Committee, remain relevant today and need to inform library planning if libraries are to become a viable social institution. Yet any hope of this happening remains rather remote.

Information for Social Change

A number of progressive information and library activists came together in 1984 and set up the organisation Information for Social Change and launched its journal *Information for Social Change* (ISC). Al Kagan (forthcoming), records the reason for the setting up of ISC:

One interviewee said that it [ISC] was launched because of a perfect combination of different things coming together at the same time. The Library Association (LA) had been towing the line of the Conservative government, which had been

in power for 18 years. Therefore the founding of ISC was a response to UK politics and the direction of the profession at that time. Further, it was inspired by LIWO's [Library and Information Workers Organisation] work in South Africa.

Kagan goes on to record ISC's links with other progressive movements at the time of its formation:

The 1994 birth of Information for Social Change (ISC) was directly preceded by two organizations initiated in 1989 and 1990, Librarians Within the Peace Movement (LWPM) and LINK: A Network for North-South Library Development. LWPM published *Alternative Information Record* (AIR, 1990-1993) and LINK published *LINK-UP* (1990-2006).

ISC has been active since its formation in 1994. It organises conferences, participates in national surveys on information and has attempted to inject some form of radicalism in CILIP. Its stand is explained in "who we are" on its website:

Information for Social Change is an activist organisation that examines issues of censorship, freedom and ethics amongst library and information workers. It is committed to promoting alternatives to the dominant paradigms of library and information work and publishes its own journal, *Information for Social Change* (freely available online at <http://www.libr.org/isc>). (ISC)

It is to the credit of those behind the organisation that they have kept the organisation going for a long time and have continued to publish its journal to date, reaching issue no. 32 (2012). This issue has an interesting item on "Kettling - A Resource List", but its editor, Martyn Lowe. This indicates the role that progressive librarians can - and are - playing in the current state of resistance where the need for information on topics such as Kettling are not likely to be met by conservative librarianship.

Open to all?

A myth maintained by the conservative librarianship is that libraries are open to all. This hides the inequality inherent in the “open only to a few” capitalist society. Their approach is typified by the current British Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government’s claim that “we are all in this together” in the current capitalist financial crisis in spite of evidence that the top layers of the society has consistently increased their income and wealth even as the working classes are squeezed by government and corporate policies.

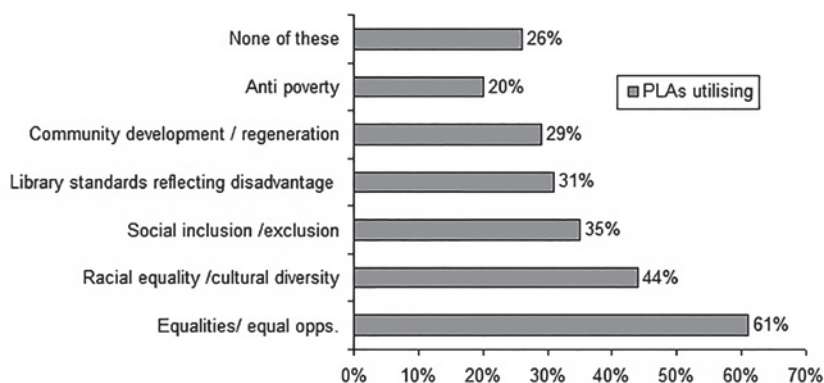
This aspect of “being open to all” is then linked by conservative librarians to the notion that There is No Alternative (TINA) to this conservative system, but as the service is open to all, it is maintained, there is no need for change anyway. Some progressive librarians, activists, practitioners and academicians in the UK took up the challenge to see if the libraries were indeed open to all. Their research report, appropriately entitled “Open to all?” (Muddiman et al, 2000) added the significant question mark at the end of the title of their report to indicate that the matter was not settled by mere assertions that libraries were open to all.

Progressive librarianship needs to make a well-researched, evidence-based case for a change programme to make sure libraries are relevant, and provide services needed by people, rather than a service that is aimed at only some sections of the population. Such a case was made powerfully by “Open to all?”

The report indicates the two approaches to librarianship:

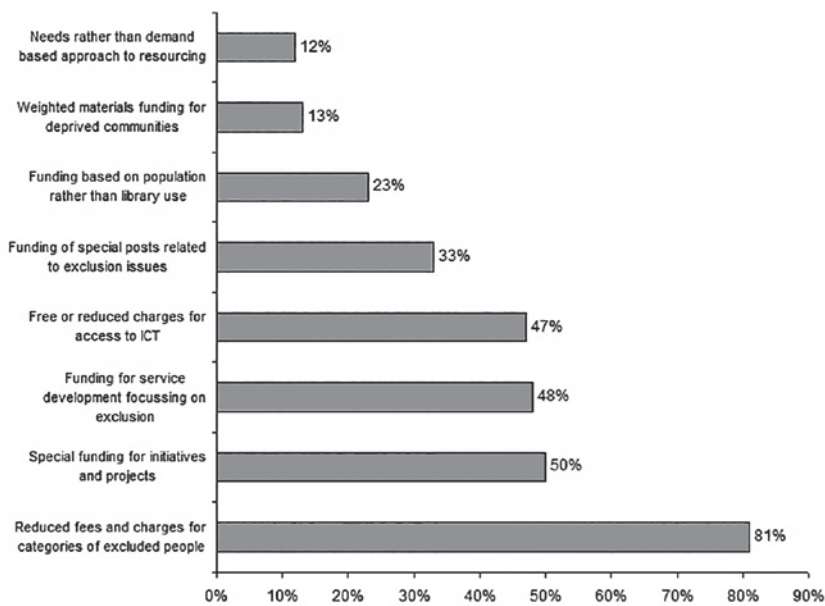
This study has suggested that there are essentially two approaches that public institutions can take to the problem of social exclusion. The weaker of these approaches (what Section 2.5 has characterised as *voluntary inclusion*) involves essentially a take it or leave it approach. People who are socially excluded are offered access to standard services, and “equality of opportunity” to make use of them. However, such approaches offer excluded people little say in the design and development of services, and tend to offer universal benefits to all rather than focusing or targeting resources on the disadvantaged or deprived. For these reasons, such

voluntary services have tended to be utilised more heavily by middle class people, or by other social groups already included in society's mainstream. Alternative, and much stronger approaches (what Section 2.5 has characterised *inclusive diversity* or *required inclusion*), essentially involve some element of redistribution of material or cultural capital to the excluded and disadvantaged. Public services adopting this route tend to focus not simply on "access" but on equalities of outcome as an overarching goal. Such services stress a much more interventionist approach to service provision incorporating strategies such as targeting, community development and positive action in favour of excluded and disadvantaged groups. Although many UK public services have experimented with elements of these approaches, they have by and large been less common than the voluntary route. (Muddiman, *et al.*, 2000. Vol. 1, p.68).



57: Open to All? - Public library policy & strategy (2000)

Public library policy and strategy



58: Open to All? - Resource strategies & social exclusion (2000)

Resource Strategies and Social Exclusion

Excluded Social Group	% of authorities identified as service priority	% of authorities with permanent services	% of authorities with staff specifically responsible	% of authorities with time limited projects	% with materials selection guidelines
Housebound people	82%	93%	81%	7%	33%
Children and Young people	82%	79%	78%	25%	57%
Disabled people	78%	72%	52%	11%	26%
Elderly people	61%	59%	47%	14%	20%
Racial and ethnic minorities	54%	49%	45%	12%	36%
Unemployed people	30%	23%	12%	11%	5%
Prisoners and families	29%	30%	33%	5%	16%
Lesbians, Gay Men and Bisexuals	19%	13%	12%	10%	9%
Women	17%	13%	8%	8%	3%
Refugees	16%	8%	9%	9%	2%
Travellers	12%	5%	6%	6%	2%
Working class people	6%	7%	10%	5%	1%
Homeless people	5%	4%	6%	5%	1%

59: Open to All? - Service development and excluded social groups (2000)

In general, the voluntary approach is favoured by conservative librarianship, while the “stronger approach” is favoured by progressive librarianship. The former leads to libraries that provide a good service to a few, but little or none too many others, while the latter moves towards a more inclusive service.

“Open to all?” sees the results of the approach taken by the public library sector in Britain:

A key conclusion of our research is that the public library has adopted, overwhelmingly, the first and weaker of these alternatives as a strategy for addressing social exclusion. As Section 3 of this overview has shown, historically, the core rationale of the public library movement has focused around the idea of developing “access for all” to a service which essentially reflected mainstream middle class, white and English values. Attempts to break out of this mould, such as the “community librarianship” movement of the 1970s and 1980s, have, our research has suggested, effectively been incorporated back into the mainstream, and the idea of “access for all” remains as powerful a rationale as ever.

It then concludes:

Provision of “access” to a mainly passive public library service is not, we believe, a strategy that will make a real impact on the social exclusion in the contemporary UK. To make such an impact, we conclude that the public library will need to become a far more proactive and interventionist public institution, with a commitment to equality, education and social justice at its core. Only then, it seems to us, will marginalised and excluded communities be returned to the mainstream of the library world. Only then will public libraries be truly open to all.

“Open to All?”’s final word on public libraries provides a strong case for progressive librarianship approach as documented in this book:

Public libraries are, at present, only superficially open to all. They provide mainly passive “access” to materials and

resources and they have service priorities and resourcing strategies which work in favour of existing library users rather than excluded or disadvantaged communities or groups. An ICT led “modernisation” of the library service is doing little to change this pattern: our research concludes that this will simply replicate existing inequities of use in an “information age”. (Open to All? Vol.1 p. xi)

It is the “transformation and change” programme that has been at the centre of all the examples given in the book. This is the conclusion of “Open to All?”

The core conclusion of the study is therefore that public libraries have the potential to play a key role in tackling social exclusion, but in order to make a real difference they will need to undergo rapid transformation and change.

It is a reflection of the state of decline in public libraries and the power relations in the profession that conservative librarianship has ensured that “Open to All?” has not been given the serious attention it deserves. Dr. Mo Mowlam MP, then Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, endorsed the report, saying “I commend this research to those who have responsibilities for libraries, to those who work in them and to those who use them”. Yet it has not featured in any Government policy on libraries, and, as indicated by the massive closure of public libraries under the current Conservative-led coalition Government, its recommendations are not likely to be even considered by this Government. With all the high-sounding praise in some professional and government officials, it is difficult to see how a service which marginalises many of its potential members can be considered a relevant and a comprehensive one.

It is in this context that the Hackney and Merton experiences of progressive librarianship activities mentioned earlier need to be assessed.

The PALIAct initiative



60: PALIAct logo

If the situation of public libraries in England falls short of meeting needs of all, the situation in Kenya and many African countries is no better. There it is compounded by lack of national resources allocated to libraries and lack of creativity and a willingness to challenge *status quo* among senior professionals. Thus the situation has remained the same since independence in the 1960s in most countries of East Africa, but with possibly some improvement in the quantity of the service, but no major change in the quality and direction of the service. It was the conservative model from Britain that remains the dominant one in Africa as well, at least in the English-speaking parts.

Progressive librarians sought to provide a model for librarians in Africa in an attempt to develop an alternative system to what was existence. They based their proposals on the experience in Kenya mentioned earlier as well as some positive experiences from the other initiatives covered in this book. Public libraries in most of the countries in Africa are as difficult to change as those in England. The proposal developed by progressive librarians was to empower middle and lower-level library staff to work with local communities and bring about change from below, without having to challenge the present power-holders if they are not positive towards moving in a new direction. The proposal was a progressive agenda entitled the Progressive African

Librarian and Information Activists' Group (PALIAct). This was an initiative based at the Department of Applied Social Sciences (DASS) at the London Metropolitan University. It was a partnership with a group of progressive African librarians and information workers. PALIAct sought to develop people-oriented information services decided upon by workers, peasants, pastoralists, fisher people and other marginalised individuals and groups whose information needs had not been met. It involved working in partnership with other professionals and service providers. PALIAct operated on principles of equality, democracy and social justice and encouraged a Pan African world outlook among information and community activists. PALIAct saw relevant information as a basic human right.

PALIAct provided a vision for a people-orientated information service that could meet the information needs of workers and peasants. It worked towards providing an anti-imperialist and a Pan African world outlook among African librarians and information workers. It also sought to set up an alternative information service in partnership with the potential users of the service as a way of showing what needed to be done. PALIAct aimed to form partnerships with progressive librarians and information and other workers within Africa and overseas.

An important principle that guided PALIAct was that there should be a strong partnership between information professionals and communities and groups. This was to ensure that librarians did not work in isolation as happens in the conservative service. At the same time, it was considered important that whatever new services were developed should reflect the real needs of communities as decided by the communities themselves. For this to happen, it was essential that communities were active partners and decision-makers in planning and monitoring services.

As the name of the organisation suggests, PALIAct was made of *activists*, not those who talk but take no action. Active participation was essential if real change was to be achieved. PALIAct recognised that the struggle for a relevant information service was intimately linked with the political struggles of the people for organising a society that ensured that material, social, cultural and political needs of the people were met.

PALIAct background

Durrani (2006b) explains the origin of the concept:

The idea for PALIAct had been under discussion over many years, but got a new lease of life during the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) meeting in Glasgow in 2002 when a number of participants agreed that a new approach to meeting Africa's information needs was overdue. This was discussed at the Africa Regional Section meeting as well as in smaller, informal groups. The key idea that emerged from these discussions was that "African librarianship needs to liberate itself from the colonial-imperialist mould". These views were in keeping with the consensus that Issak (2000) found:

The consensus of opinion seems to be that African librarians need to rethink what a public library is all about, in terms of what is needed, what will be used, and what is sustainable in Africa. Perhaps some new and more viable visions will result. In particular, public libraries in Africa need to start to be more aggressive and introduce services that are attractive to the users. Librarians must begin to know their potential users, and not only assume that they are school children. More dynamism and more involvement of the user community, extended to all users are required for the improvement of public library services.

Those who showed an interest in the ideas discussed at IFLA came from Britain, Cameroon, Cuba, Ethiopia (including librarians from the Economic Commission for Africa), Ghana, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria and USA. An informal network of those interested was set up, but no action was taken to formalise the organisation. It was felt that the first step was to spread the idea widely in Africa and develop the organisation once there was sufficient grassroots support. The proposal was revived when a librarian from Ghana, George Obeng, visited Ethiopia in 2004 and met some of those present at the Glasgow IFLA meetings. He wrote to the author:

I was in Addis Ababa for a UN documentation workshop last October... on the last day I had dinner with Petrina, the

Librarian at the ECA. She talked extensively about how you tried to work on the progressive library association. You could see that it pains her that it couldn't work. Why don't you try to revive it? [E-mail from George Obeng to Shiraz Durrani, 24 December, 2004].

It was then decided to launch a semi-formal "ideas forum" as the first stage of setting up a progressive organisation. A formal organisation could then be set up if and when the idea takes root. Thus was born PALIAct.

The main task then was to translate some of the ideas mentioned above into practice, to move from ideas to action. Perhaps the best advice one could give on this was that there are no ready-made solutions. Each activist needed to investigate their own local situation, understand their communities and work with them to find a relevant service which could meet their needs. It was necessary to investigate and understand the power relations between different classes and communities in order to find the best solutions for a particular situation. Activists need to win the confidence of those seeking equality and social justice and they would then become the librarians' best allies in bring about change. As there are no textbook solutions, it was necessary that activists take calculated risks and be creative in the way they manage library services.

IFLA (2005) published a PALIAct statement on the launch of the organisation, explaining its stand:

Progressive African Librarian and Information Activists' Group (PALIAct) is an initiative of a group of progressive African librarians and information workers. We recognize that current 'leaders' in the African information field have done little to break the colonial and imperialist policies and practices in meeting the information needs of working people in Africa, or to make the profession more relevant to the needs of African librarians and information workers. We have therefore decided to take the initiative to set up an alternative organization – the Progressive African Library and Information Activists' Group – PALIAct.

PALIACT will provide a new vision to help create a people-orientated information service that can meet the information needs of workers and peasants. It will work towards providing an anti-imperialist and a Pan African world outlook among African librarians and information workers. It will also seek to set up an alternative information service in partnership with the potential users of the service as a way of showing what our 'official' libraries and information workers should be doing. PALIACT will form partnerships with progressive information and other workers within Africa and overseas.

The Project will bring together the resources, skills, and labour of those who accept its vision for a relevant information service, based on the principles of equality, equity, social justice, and democracy.

Membership of PALIACT is open to all who agree with the Vision and Principles of PALIACT, and agree to contribute their labour, skills or other resources to the Project.

Pambazuka News (2005) explains its stand, vision and plan of action:

The PALIACT Vision

To develop a people-oriented information service run and managed by/on behalf of workers, peasants, pastoralists, fisher people and other marginalised individuals and groups whose information needs have not been met. The new service will be based on equality for all African nationalities, for women, disabled people, classes.

The PALIACT Stand

PALIACT recognises the right to relevant information as a basic human right. This right must be enshrined in the constitution of all African countries and be endorsed as an active programme by the African Union.

The struggle for a relevant information service is intimately linked with the political struggles of the people for organising

a society that ensures that material, social, cultural and political needs of the people are met. PALIAct believes that the opportunity for making fundamental changes created as a direct result of political victories in the early period of struggle for liberation was lost. The opportunity that history had brought to our doorsteps to provide a people-orientated information service was lost. Instead of challenging the very basis on which library and information services were built, we allowed ourselves to be manipulated into making merely quantitative changes in library services, but failed to make any qualitative changes. The classes who were served by the colonial library service continued to be served and the needs of working people who had always remained outside the remit of such services remained unmet. Their experiences, their cultures, their very language remained outside the walls of impressive library buildings. Thus the advantage gained in the early period of struggle for a society and an information system which served the needs of all of its people was lost. The struggle for such an information service continues to date.

As an example, information about lives, thoughts and achievements of African heroes such as Cabral, Kimaathi, Lumumba, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Pinto, to name a few, is hardly known or taught in African schools and Universities. Few African libraries collect works about or by them. In this respect, African information workers have not served their communities well.

The PALIAct programme is therefore an activist agenda to ensure that the information rights of African people are recognised in theory as well as in practice. While PALIAct struggles to ensure that this right is restored to the people of Africa, it will set up pilot projects to develop ideas and practices that will guide its programme to ensure the ultimate creation of a people-orientated information services.

The PALIAct principles

In its commitment to developing a people-orientated information service, PALIAct is committed to:

1. The principles of social justice, equality, equity, human welfare, and the development of cultural and social democracy; thus we shall actively address historical inequalities in the information field in Africa;
2. Achieving equality of access to and inclusiveness of information services, especially extending such services to the workers, peasants and the poor, the marginalized and those who have been discriminated against;
3. The provision of a relevant service to those active in the struggles for social justice and who are working towards the creation of a liberated Africa;
4. Supporting the collection, organization, preservation and dissemination of the documents of people's struggles in all forms and languages;
5. Making available alternative materials representing a wide range of progressive viewpoints from within Africa and overseas and which are often excluded by traditional libraries, mass media and educational and information systems;
6. Encouraging the exploration of alternative models of services; promoting and disseminating critical analysis of information technology's impact on libraries and societies; and support the fundamental democratization of existing institutions of education, culture, communications;
7. Undertaking joint, interdisciplinary research into fundamental library issues (e.g. into the political economy of information in the age of neo-liberalism and corporate globalization) in order to lay the basis for effective action in our spheres of work;

8. Investigating and organizing efforts to make the library-as-workplace more democratic and encourage resistance to the managerialism of the present library culture;
9. Promoting international solidarity among librarians and cooperation between libraries across borders on the basis of our joint commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related covenants which create a democratic framework for constructive cooperative endeavours;
10. Organizing in partnership with other activists in the cultural and educational fields, to help put issues of social responsibility on the agendas of international bodies such as IFLA and UNESCO;
11. Opposing corporate globalization which, despite its claims, reinforces existing social, economic, cultural inequalities, and working towards the creation of a democratic globalism and internationalism which respects and cultivates cultural plurality, which recognizes the sovereignty of peoples, which acknowledges the obligations of society to the individual and communities, and which prioritizes human values and needs over profits.

Programme of activities

Short term:

1. Set up a core group of PALIAct activists to launch the Group.
2. Each group to initiate a pilot project based on PALIAct principles, on voluntary basis or from funds provided by friendly organisations. Activities to raise funds would be a good starting point, e.g. film shows.
3. Collect and disseminate relevant progressive material in the information field from a working class point of view.

4. Influence syllabi and teaching programmes in African Universities teaching information studies so as to reflect African, anti-imperialist and working class point of view and sources in their teaching programmes.
5. Actively recruit members for PALIAct from African libraries and Universities.
6. Set up of a web presence for PALIAct.
7. Set up a discussion board to get views on the future of PALIAct from progressive librarians in Africa; invite support from outside Africa once an African-based group is established.
8. Seek financial support for PALIAct to carry out its work, e.g. UNESCO, IFLA, COMLA and progressive librarians groups in other countries.

It will be noted that the PALIAct principles have been adopted from the Ten Point Program (2000) indicating its internationalist outlook. While the organisation was initially supported by London Metropolitan University, this support gradually faded with changing priorities and a narrower focus on the progressive social agenda. At the early stage, funds from the Quality Leaders Project were used to produce its first Newsletter in January 2006 under the title *PALIAct Ideas & Action*. By the time of the publication of the second issue in December 2006, its name was changed to *Information Equality, Africa: Newsletter of the Progressive African Library and Information Activists' Group – PALIAct*.

PALIAct Ideas & Action (January 2006) explained its scope:

PALIAct Ideas & Action is an irregular publication which carries news on developing the PALIAct vision to help create a people-orientated information service that can meet the information needs of workers and peasants in Africa. It will also bring news about innovative services, experiences and ideas from all countries and continents where similar struggle for creating "information equality" are taking place. You are welcome to suggest items for future issues.

It also reported on the formation of the Kenya PALIAct Centre:

The PALIAct Kenya Centre has had elections and an interim Committee has been elected. They are busy with various organisational tasks to build a strong foundation. They are also establishing links with interested organisations and individuals. The PALIAct approach involves building strategic partnership between library and information professionals and activists on the one hand and local communities on the other. The Kenya Centre is taking this requirement very seriously.

Information Equality, Africa No.2 reported on further developments on the Kenya Centre:

The consolidation of PALIAct is reflected in a number of developments which will be reported in this and subsequent issues. These include:

1. Developing strong links with the World Social Forum. Two PALIAct members from Kenya represented PALIAct at the Library Workshop at the WSF in Bamako 2006. PALIAct was successful in its funding application to the Finnish Government for funds for these visits.
2. PALIAct working in partnership with the Kenya Library Association and Network Institute for Global Democratization (NIGD) successfully organised a workshop for 30 librarians from Kenya and Uganda to prepare them to take up the information challenge at the next WSF in Nairobi in 2007.
3. Several PALIAct members and sympathisers attended the XVII Standing Conference of Eastern, Central, & Southern African Library & Information Professionals (SCECSAL XVII), Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 10th 14th July 2006 and made important links with librarians from the whole region.
4. Informal links continue with the Social Enterprise Development Foundation of West Africa with a view to setting up a PALIAct Centre in Ghana.

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Information Equality, Africa Newsletter of the Progressive African Library and Information Activists' Group - PALIACT http://www.seapn.org.uk/PALIACT-new.html	
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61: Information Equality, Africa. No. 2 (PALIACT) 2006

Report from the PALIACT Kenya Centre: Training the trainers, WSF Workshop for librarians, 3-5 July Nairobi.

Following the above Bamako Polycentric, PALIACT and NIGD successfully applied for funding for a "training the trainers, WSF Workshop" for librarians. This took place on 3-5 July Nairobi and was attended by 30 Kenyan and Uganda librarians. As PALIACT had not been registered, it was decided to work in partnership with the Kenya Library Association – which proved a very fruitful partnership.⁵⁸

While PALIACT remains a strong example of a possible progressive way forward, lack of resources has prevented its further development. As mentioned earlier, London Metropolitan University was no longer

⁵⁸ As with all QLP documents, PALIACT publications are also available at its website http://www.seapn.org.uk/editorial.asp?page_id=62, kindly supported by the Network Tackling Social Exclusion in Libraries, Museums, Archives and Galleries.

able to support its work. Further difficulties were created when links between key activities at the 2002 IFLA conference was broken for technical reasons. The idea did take roots in Zimbabwe where a very active PALIAct-Zimbabwe network still exists. It is noteworthy that it has been kept going by the enthusiasm of key activists with support from the larger library and information workers.⁵⁹

Diversity Council



62: Diversity Council conference (2001)

Delegates at the March 14, 2001 meeting (l to r) Prof. Ismail Abdullahi, Anne Thompson (ACLA), Shiraz Durrani, Michael Junor (Race & Class) Gulshan Iqbal, Kamaljit Bedi and Shashi Dorey (ALAG) and John Pateman (Race & Class).

The Diversity Council was yet another attempt to bring issues of race and class to the library field. Let the newsletter of the Diversity Council, *Diversity: Newsletter of the Diversity Council Advocating equality in diversity*⁶⁰ tell its story. The first issue, dated June 2001 gave information about its formation:

⁵⁹ All documents produced by PALIAct are available at its website: http://www.seapn.org.uk/editorial.asp?page_id=62

⁶⁰ All issues of *Diversity* are available at its website: http://www.seapn.org.uk/listDocuments.asp?page_id=53 [Accessed: 03-10-12].

An historic event took place in London on March 14th, 2001 when, under the guidance of Prof. Ismail Abdullahi, a number of organisations came together to form the Diversity Council. The three organisations that form the Diversity Council are African Caribbean Library Association (ACLA), the Asian Librarians and Advisers Group (ALAG), and Race and Class Group (RCG). SPICE and the Chinese Library Support Group have since joined DC.

The issue gave details of the groups that came together to form the DC. In its short existence, the Diversity Council produced 5 issues of *Diversity* which began to have an impact beyond its limited resources. The editorial in issue no. 4-5 (2002) summed up the library situation in the country:

“Tokenism, complacency, fossilization, resistance” are the real enemies of change in the library world today. It is doubtful whether Government library planners are yet aware of the full extent of the resistance that exists, let alone how to handle it to ensure that meaningful change takes place in a required time frame to ensure the emergence of a relevant information service in Britain. The DCMS’s work in developing a new Public Library Strategy to be released later this year is perhaps the best chance to ensure that real change takes place.

So where is the new leadership likely to come from in this rather gloomy situation? Perhaps we need to look outside the boundaries of Britain to see what other people and organisations are doing. The newly emerging “Progressive Library” movement with centres in the USA, Mexico, Scandinavia and other countries as well as recent developments on the African and South Asian fronts are all pointing to a new co-operative, people-oriented approach to information work linking with the real needs of people. The Ten Point Programme reproduced in this issue of *Diversity* is being adopted by progressive librarians everywhere. It can provide a real basis of working together in a principled way.

In Britain it is small organisations like the Diversity Council, Information for Social Change, LINK and Race, Class and Equality which are leading the way in finding new ways of “relevant librarianship”. The Diversity Council can play an even bigger part in this search for relevance if given real support, resources and independence it needs to adopt a radical agenda without being tied down by bureaucratic rules and indifference that can only stifle its young shoots.

The struggle for an equal, relevant library service is a long one. We have taken only the first steps to date.

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Diversity

Newsletter of the Diversity Council
Advocating equality
diversity@iiscmail.ac.uk

No. 2
October 2001

Celebrating Black History Month



The Diversity Council celebrating Black History Month in Brick Lane with Prof. Ismail Abdullahi

Full details in the next issue of Diversity

This issue of *Diversity* celebrates Black History Month by looking at the needs of refugees in Europe. We look at how Manchester is meeting the needs of refugees, and take a look into history of slavery. Larry Elliott's article in the *Guardian* looks at the economic factors which give rise to refugees. It is also worth remembering that the largest number of refugees in the world today are in Africa and Asia. Uganda and Tanzania have given support to millions of refugees – without questioning if they are “political” or “economic” refugees. Just one town in Pakistan supports a million refugees from Afghanistan – soon to be multiplied two or three times with the current war there. The real needs – material as well as information – of the refugees are often forgotten – except by the refugees themselves.

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Diversity circulated among community members and received some positive response. In a letter to the Editor, carried in issue no. 4-5 (2002), the Editor of the *Goan Overseas Digest* wrote:

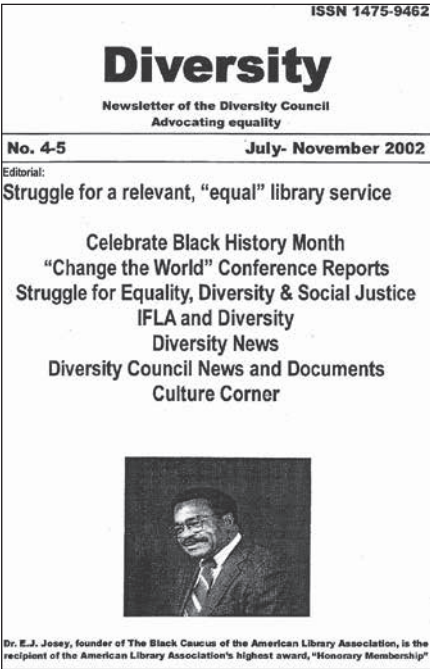
Thanks for the third issue of *Diversity*. It is an impressive publication crammed with articles, notices, reviews and assorted nuggets of info. I wish we had a similar publication on diversity issues beyond the info world. The contributors are clearly a dedicated lot. Your own editorial set out the aims of the DC very well and served notice to wavering Library heads. I hope they all join the diversity brigade soon and that the LA extends recognition to DC without delay.

Liz Smallwood's long article on Community Development comes at an interesting time when the Home Office is plugging its own pet phrase community cohesion (apparently borrowed from Canada).

Eddie D'Sa

Editor, *Goan Overseas Digest*. 27 May, 2002.

Given the difficulties for any progressive movement to survive in a rather conservative library world, the founder members of the Diversity Council agreed to dissolve it and emerge as the Diversity Group (DG) of CILIP. It was to be the death of the vision of the Diversity Council whose strong point was that it was a political movement rooted in their respective communities. The Diversity Group was neither political nor rooted in the community. It soon became a part of the vast bureaucracy of CILIP. An indication of its spiritual death was the cessation of the dynamic *Diversity*. But it was no accidental death. The CILIP agenda was to absorb the "dangerous" Diversity Council and render it ineffective by entwining it in its deadening bureaucracy and deprive it of the oxygen that comes from democracy and links to the communities. Yet another lesson for progressive librarians: understand your true friends and enemies, do not become complacent when you receive crumbs from the masters.



64: Diversity. No. 4-5 (2002)

Quality Leaders Project – Youth (QLP-Y)



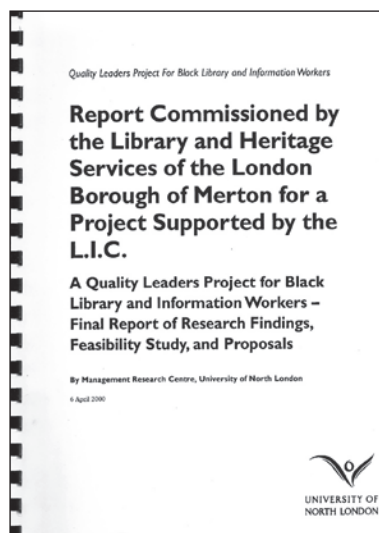
Quality Leaders Project – Youth
65: QLP logo

The training programme of middle and senior managers in librarianship often leaves gaps in the skills that librarians have in the work place. This affects not only the actual practice in delivering a relevant service, but also a lack of an appropriate vision and an awareness to plan and deliver

a service that meets people's changing needs. This can then result in uneven services or in not providing services to those with most need, such as young people or working class people or women or Black and ethnic minority community members. At the same time, even when some key skills are included in the curriculum, there is no linked opportunity to learn such skills in practice and to gain relevant experience. There is often disconnect between theory and practice. An area that is generally not well taught or where no appropriate experience is provided is what can be called "social aspects of information". Whereas technical aspects covering skills such as cataloguing and ICT-related skills and experience are provided, the development of social skills is often inadequate. This void has created a deficit in services to minorities, young people and working classes generally, while services to women or to single parents, refugees, among others, also suffer.



66: Evaluation of QLP Pilot Project (MRC) 2001

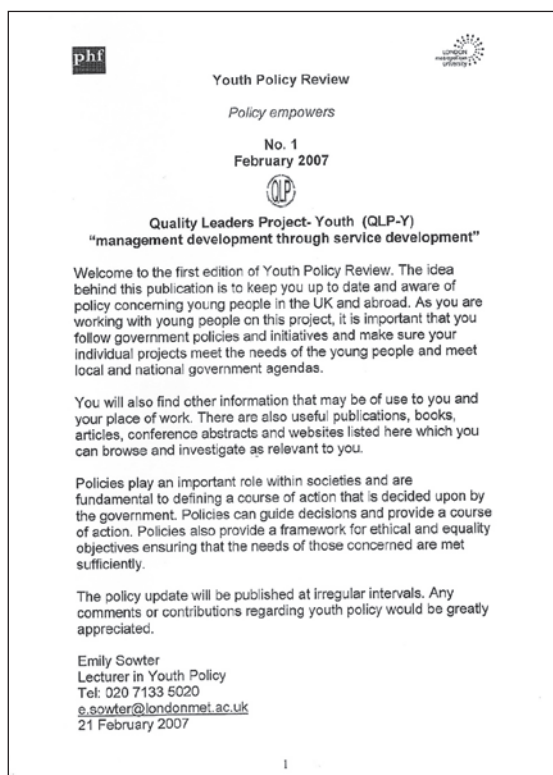


67: QLP Feasibility Report by MRC (2000)

At the same time, conservative library services are not guided by the needs of their communities and no meaningful consultation with them informs library policies. While those with political, social and economic connections are able to influence the direction of the service, those without such connections are left without relevant service. Indeed,

library services are not open to all in all these aspects. Thus the two key deficits in library work are a lack of appropriate service to the communities and a lack of relevant skills to develop and deliver a needed service on the part of the staff.

It was in order to address these gaps that the Quality Leaders Project was started as a pilot project in progressive librarianship. The thinking behind it was informed by earlier experiences in Kenya and in Hackney, with lessons learnt at Merton and at the London Metropolitan University helped to fine tune it. It is also noteworthy that an important influence in the final design was input from the Management Research Centre (now part of the Business School) of the London Metropolitan University which had provided staff training at Merton. The programme was developed through a coming together of the library professionals and practitioners with researchers in management skills.



This section examines the experience of the Quality Leaders Project and its later strand, the Quality Leaders Project for youth (QLP-Y).

The Quality Leaders Project (QLP) started in 1998 as a way of addressing the lack of appropriate developmental opportunities for staff from Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) communities, very few of whom had reached senior management ranks. It then became a model of addressing all areas of skill and service development. Its subsequent phase, QLP-Youth, addressed staff *competencies* in developing services to young people. It is not the intention here to trace the early history of QLP, which has been adequately provided in a number of articles, particularly in Durrani (2002). Key documents are available at the QLP website.⁶¹

The QLP started life in Hackney when some senior managers were also active in the various initiatives mentioned earlier in the Hackney section. It then moved with these members to Merton in 1998 and then to London Metropolitan University in 2005 where it was based in the Department of Applied Social Sciences (DASS) and worked in partnership with the Management Research Centre (MRC) of the University.

The QLP approach was one of “management development through service development” as it aimed to tackle the dual challenges of providing relevant, needed services to communities and also equal employment and developmental opportunities for staff.

The programme was opened out to local authority libraries from around the country. The initial programmes attracted authorities from London as well as some from outside London. The participating authorities selected their library managers to be “Quality Leaders” (QL) or as members of local QLP teams. They were then seconded on to the scheme, but continued to work in their own organisations whilst engaged in a six-month, part-time or full-time program of work-based learning, structured around a development project. During this period of six months, the QLs and their teams developed a range of leadership and managerial skills and were introduced to various policy initiatives within a national and global context.

Over the period of six months, the Quality Leaders devised a service development proposal based upon original research and consultation into the needs of the local communities. During their

⁶¹ Further details on QLP are available from www.seapn.org.uk/qlp.html#current.

secondment, QLPs convened and led a QLP Development Team in their work places. These were composed of membership which reflected local cultural diversity. At least one member of the team came from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities while other “excluded” minority groups – for e.g. refugees or people with disabilities – were encouraged to participate. Authorities were also encouraged to include members from partner organisations (Council Departments, volunteer groups, community members) in their development teams.

On successfully meeting the course requirements, delegates were awarded a Diploma in Work Based Learning from the London Metropolitan University. This was an important achievement for the students as they could use these credits to further their careers. This approach compares with the approach of many authorities who sponsor their staff to attend in-house or external courses and “training” conferences and all they have to show for it is a certificate of attendance. With QLP, on the other hand, the QLPs received a recognised University Diploma, and the authorities got a well-researched proposal for service development relevant to the needs in their communities as well as trained staff to deliver it.

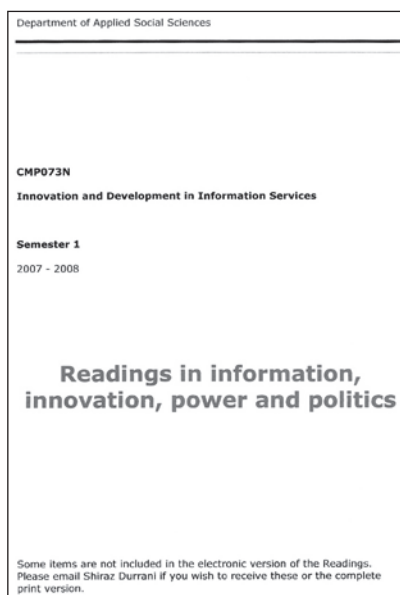
Following the completion of the BME strand of QLP, a different strand – dealing with skills for developing services to young people was started. Participants for this strand of QLP-Youth (QLP-Y) were London Boroughs of Barnet and Haringey, Lincolnshire and Portsmouth. The funding for the project was provided by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to whom quarterly reports were made. These contained a high level of in-depth information about how the project was working and developing.⁶²

The QLP approach emphasised the need for policies to guide action. This was to ensure that it was not the personal preferences of decision makers and senior managers that were deciding on practice. Thus QLP-Y placed great emphasis on responding to national and international policies before deciding on a plan of action. It established a publication, *Youth Policy Review* to encourage the studying policies and debating issues around implementation. In its second issue, Smallwood (2008b) explains the necessity of taking a policy approach:

⁶² These reports, together with all other material is available at the QLP website, <http://www.seapn.org.uk/qlp.html>.

Sometimes staff, especially staff working “on the ground”, may feel that it is not necessary to be aware of policy changes: they will “do” any changes when they are asked. Additionally, some managers may not see policy information as necessary for staff below a certain grade and may feel that such information “overburdens” staff unnecessarily. This can result in staff who, whilst highly compliant, may find that their lack of understanding of the context for change makes dealing with the change more difficult. However, understanding the policy background to service change can lead to a clearer understanding of the change and is likely to be helpful in easing the transition to changed priorities and changed ways of working.

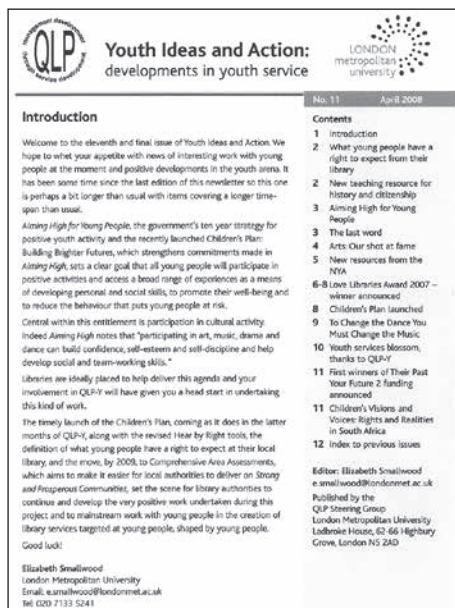
It is interesting to note that *Youth Policy Review* examined policies at a number of levels: policies with public library focus, youth focus, Departmental focus and international focus so as to ensure an all-round approach to policy work. The policy aspect was also taken up in the publication, *Readings in information, innovation, power and politics* (2007).



Smallwood (2008b) goes on to explain the important of yet another aspect emphasised by QLP – debates and informed discussions:

A member of public library staff once suggested to me “you don’t need to have an opinion on everything”. I couldn’t disagree more! Indeed, I feel that a lack of opinion, may be said to be commensurate with a lack of engagement and as engaged staff are the lifeblood of a dynamic organisation, opinions are vital! All services benefit from informed discussion and debate at all levels but a lack of informed opinion is surely a very weak starting point for informed discussion, and this must be to the detriment of any service. However, an understanding of the policy background informing change can help to drive forward informed discussion.

Another concern that the QLP had was to ensure all its participants welcomed new ideas and were keen on taking action to implement them when appropriate. This aspect was emphasised in its other publication, *QLP Ideas and Action*.





71: QLP Youth Policy Review No. 2 (2008)

Besides the important staff development aspect, QLP-Y also sought to provide skills in consultation and developing new services to meet new or unmet needs. Here an important aspect was the “audience development approach” which was used to reach those members of the community not reached before in an innovative way. This approach expanded on what has come to be known as “reader development”. However, the term “audience development” was preferred to “reader development”. “Audience development” was considered a more inclusive term as it included people who may have visual impairment and met the needs of disabled people generally. It included people who may not be literate either in English or in their own languages. It also allows for connecting people to the “reading experience” through non-print media, such as arts, cinema, music, drama and other cultural activities. It involved all the senses, rather than being restricted to the use of just one.

The “audience development” approach to library and youth work developed new areas of service provision. Over a period of time, this approach helped to develop a new model of joined-up library-youth service activities.



72: QLP Final Report update (2010)

Audience development workshops

These workshop sessions were perhaps the most innovative part of the Project. The sessions were programmed to reflect the specific aspects that the young people themselves decided met their needs. The workshop activities thus needed to be flexible and tailored to meet local requirements. They enabled young people themselves to be the providers of such sessions, rather than being merely passive recipients of a service provided by an “outsider”. At the same time, the programme enabled outside skills, ideas and expertise to be brought into the local youth communities, thereby injecting new and different ideas on the local scene.

The QLP-Y programme provided regular workshop sessions in each of the two years of the life of the Project. Activities included presentations from writers, poets, film makers, media and other professionals, music workshops, book and newsletter production sessions, broadcast workshops, film making modules, various informal learning experiences, ICT-related activities, guest speakers from

different fields as a way of enabling the young people to meet potential role models from diverse communities and from different fields.

Such sessions allowed young people who had not used library or youth services in the past to be active participants in a new service which they themselves helped to design and deliver. Audience development workshop facilitation was done by the relevant Quality Leader. This helped not only to develop new skills in staff members, but is also a way of bringing about organisational change and to mainstream equality.

The Workshops were incorporated in QLP-Y on the basis that the learning and social needs of young people could be met more meaningfully as part of a cultural and social programme so as to avoid a feeling of “school out of school”. The crucial element was the empowerment of young people so that it is they who decided on the type of activity they are comfortable with.

It is useful to see the type of “audience development activities” that QLP-Y supported to see the real impact of the project and its impact, both on staff in authorities in terms of their development and in terms of the targeted community, in this case young people. Such a range and quality of activities had never been undertaken by the conservative library service, so that this was a major achievement for progressive librarianship in England.

Among the activities undertaken by young people participating in QLP-Y in Merton in its earlier phase was the production of the youth magazine, *Merton Sense* in Merton. Another activity, in Barnet, saw the young people producing films with the winners awarded a “Barnet Oscar”. Barnet Council’s publicity provides details:

The Barnet Oscars

Education Service Bulletin
December 2006

Budding film makers walked the red carpet during a special film premiere at Chipping Barnet Library on the 14th December.

The film titled “I’m lovin’ my library” has been created by a group of young people from Barnet and is an interesting insight into what teenagers think of the borough’s library service and how they hope to see it develop in the future.

The film is the product of collaboration between the Library, Youth and Connexions Services to encourage greater library membership.

The teenagers involved attended workshops to learn video production and editing techniques and then interviewed young people from various centres. The interviews were then compiled to create a 10 minute informative film.

The initiative is part of the Quality Leaders Project – Youth Strand, which is funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and managed by London Metropolitan University.

The range of activities in Barnet is indicated by Lusted (2008). Saying that “Barnet came late into the QLP-Y Project so its activities are not yet quite finished”, she goes on to record Barnet’s involvement in QLP-Y which included the following audience development activities:

- Film project by young people. Young people produced a film about their library, from the perspective of young people, entitled *I’m Lovin’ the Library*.
- PlayStation competition. The aim of this competition as to encourage young people into the library; to raise awareness of library facilities; to raise awareness of PS games in the library. 6 competition heats were held in a variety of libraries with young people involved in organising and delivering the competition. Over 100 young people attended.
- Liberation project. A series of workshops, facilitated by tutors, who supported young people to explore issues around the theme of slavery and child labour and to produce original music (using composition software), lyrics, dance, poetry and creative writing on this theme. The work was performed in a final “X factor” style competition, with young people devising the scoring and acting as the judges.

- Drama project. A series of drama workshops on the theme of gangs and bullying as requested by young people and run by a specialist drama youth worker. This project ran over the course of five weeks and included two filming and editing workshops at Finchley Youth Theatre. The final drama was filmed and edited with the support of a professional filmmaker and was screened to an invited audience.
- PlayStation competition 2. This competition built on the success of the earlier PlayStation competition and a core group of young people were involved in the planning, organising and refereeing of the competition.
- Library Youth Board. As Barnet approaches the end of QLP-Y, it has created a proposal to mainstream what it has learnt and to enable youth participation to become central to future library service provision. Consisting of young people, and facilitated by a staff member, the Board will hold its first official meeting in the New Year. It will meet once per term to discuss services and activities and to advice on stock, staff recruitment and to take part in staff training. To achieve this, Barnet will hold five meetings to prepare participants and involve them in a residential event at a centre, where they will take part in team building activities and the development of skills that they have identified they wish to develop such as leadership; confidence building; teaching and training staff; managing ideas and meetings; supporting others. The progress of the Board is being closely monitored by Barnet's Voice of the Child Coordinator, who wants to conduct a case study of its development for other staff in Barnet Council.

Percival (2008) provides details of Portsmouth's involvement in QLP-Y which included the following audience development activities:

- Art workshops. Art workshops, co-ordinated by a care worker, took place in five residential centres for

looked after children. Young people produced their own artwork, which was then professionally framed and exhibited at the Central Library. The work raised the self-esteem of the young people while the exhibition raised wider public awareness of looked after children.

- Design workshops. A professional designer supported young people to produce eye-catching library publicity. The young people were then responsible for organising the distribution of the publicity in youth spaces, across the city, finding audiences not normally associated with libraries.
- Magazine development workshop. This workshop was delivered to set the ball rolling for an initiative that would enable the library service to support young people producing a manga magazine. The workshop identified certain skills needs, which were addressed subsequently through the ADA [Audience Development Activity] process.
- Desktop publishing course with office design consultancy. This course was delivered to provide young people with the skills needed to produce a professional magazine from the production of the publication itself, to the layout of the office from which it would be produced.
- Jeet Kune Do (martial arts) workshop. This workshop was delivered as a means of providing an exciting and relevant activity for young people, following discussion with them about what activities they would like. The success of the workshop has led to further sessions being funded locally and many of those attending the library sessions will attend further sessions. 60 young people attended and 20 young people joined the library as a result.
- Manga workshop. A professional manga artist offered tips on how to improve manga drawing and develop one's own personal style to benefit the manga magazine referred to above.

- *Yatta!* Magazine project. Following the workshops/ course referred to above, the library service provided young people with an office space for the production of a manga magazine called *Yatta!* QLP-Y funded the office furniture and equipment with young people choosing the furniture and equipment, deciding on the layout of the room and painting it themselves.



73: *Yatta!* Portsmouth youth magazine

- Liberation project. Intergenerational activity utilising the skills of younger people to assist older/disabled clients of the Community Library Service in gaining access to vital community/health information in MP3 format.

Smallwood (2008a) provides a succinct summary of the approach and achievement of QLP-Y:

Four library authorities have been involved in QLP-Y – London Borough of Barnet, London Borough of Haringey, Lincolnshire County Council and Portsmouth City Council. ... That change has been delivered in each, despite the differences between them, shows that with commitment and

imagination the QLP-Y model can deliver change regardless of organisational differences.

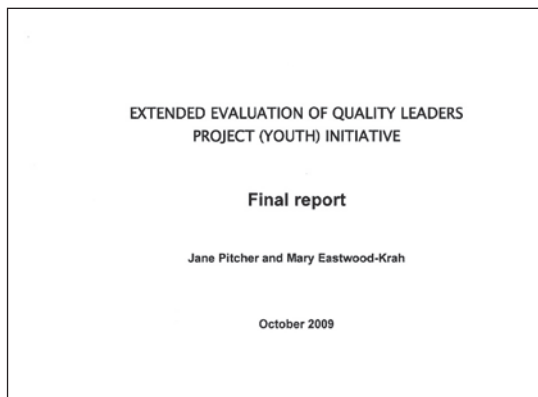
Funded by the National Youth Agency and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the aim of QLP-Y has been to address social exclusion of young people from libraries and other services, through the development of innovative services responsive to young people's needs, which create opportunities for them to participate in society and to develop their creativity, reading and life skills. Whilst libraries have, traditionally, been very good at engaging with young children they have generally been less successful at engaging older children/young people, a gap that QLP-Y has sought to bridge.

Whilst other initiatives may have sought to address the need for new and innovative services for young people that address their social exclusion, we feel that QLP-Y is unique in taking a "management development through service development" approach. Taking the view that staff need key management skills to help deliver the cultural change necessary for the development of new and enhanced services that address exclusion, QLP-Y develops staff as managers by supporting them to work with young people in the development of innovative services for young people.

A project, by definition, has a finite timescale. Without the significant personal development of those engaged in a project, it is unlikely that innovative or enhanced services will continue to be developed within an organisation once the "safety net" of the project ceases to exist. The requirements for embedding change are such that they are likely to be met with resistance and it is the development of key skills that can help to overcome this resistance, help smooth the path of change for colleagues, easing them into changed ways of working and ultimately help to build capacity for change amongst one's colleagues. QLP-Y, therefore, has given Quality Leaders the opportunity to take a wider, strategic approach to service development; to consider obstacles to

change and how they might be overcome; to work cross-departmentally and cross-sectorally, building relationships within and without the organisation; to hone negotiation and advocacy skills; to devise imaginative consultation and engagement mechanisms and ultimately to build their own knowledge, confidence and ability in leading and managing change. By giving staff the opportunity to develop such relevant skills, organisations may help to retain some of their most committed individuals, whilst developing them as agents of change and, in so doing, help lay the foundations for service-wide cultural change.

In addition much thought had gone into deciding what is, and what is not, a “QLP activity” which could be supported by the Project. The QLP core Group, based at the London Metropolitan University demanded an evidence-based project proposal to show that the service proposal has been driven and needed by young people, and that it met the QLP criteria. Some authorities were critical of all the paperwork this involved. While this was reduced to a certain respect towards the end of the project, it was made clear that unless there was a tight control over what qualifies as meeting the QLP criteria, there was a danger of the QLP becoming any and everything that some communities wanted it to be and thus lose its distinguishing characteristics. It was felt within the QLP Steering Group that such was the case with another Project also funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the Welcome to your Library Project which was rather relaxed about what actually happened in the participating authorities. The QLP approach can be explained further with a few examples.



74: QLP-Y extended evaluation (Final) 2009

Aims of the QLP-Y Project and the evaluation

The Quality Leaders Project –Youth (QLP-Y) was led by London Metropolitan University and funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation from October 2005 to December 2007. The project took place in four local authorities. Its aims were:

- to refocus public library service so that services to young people are mainstreamed in accordance with the real needs of young people;
- to provide new skills to library workers so that they can develop and deliver new and innovative services needed by young people;
- develop, plan and implement new services for young people in partnership with the youth themselves, and with other stakeholders, thereby empowering service users;
- to increase social cohesion by encouraging inter-generational work and by encouraging different communities to work together.

A two-year evaluation of the project was undertaken, with the final report being presented in December 2007. Subsequent to this evaluation, three local authorities, Barnet, Haringey and Portsmouth, have continued with a small number of project activities. In addition, some

project staff took part in a Module at London Metropolitan University entitled "Innovation and development in Information Services".

- EXTENDED EVALUATION OF QUALITY LEADERS PROJECT (YOUTH) INITIATIVE. Final report. Jane Pitcher and Mary Eastwood-Krah. October 2009.

The QLP and the library ethos

The Quality Leaders Project (QLP) was a significant departure from the conservative library service model.⁶³ A few key aspects can be mentioned here. First, it sought to improve the *quality* of service, not just the quantity such as longer opening hours providing "more of the same" and to the same current users. The Project started by asking fundamental questions about the service: what, why and how. These were tested against the "Needs-based" chart developed in Merton that we examined earlier to ensure they fit in with the vision and aims of a library service. If they did not, they were referred to an appropriate service deliverer, such as the Council's Youth Service who were also partners in the QLP(Y) project.

A case in point was the need identified in some authorities for a "youth meeting space". If such activities were not within the scope of a library, they were not undertaken as part of the Project, but if they included reading, learning and information-related activities, they were taken on-board. This ensured that libraries did not become "everything to everybody." Also rejected were activities which involved merely the use of library space being by other service providers, for example teaching classes by colleges or the rent of library halls for non-library activities. An example of such an activity was the use of a Merton library for the Council's Benefits Office which wanted to use library space and library staff to deliver benefits advice to local residents – something that was not within the remit of library staff. While the programme did go ahead in Merton as a Council-required service, it was not included in the QLP-Y programme developed at the Pollards Hill Library as we saw earlier. Such clarification is important as otherwise the library loses its distinguishing feature from the rest

⁶³ It is covered in more details in a number of articles as well as the full documentation available at its website www.seapn.org.uk/qlp/.

of the Council. The long-term effect of such “everything approach” can be seen today in the increasing use of untrained volunteers in “running” libraries as a way of saving costs of running libraries. But in the process, the service loses the crucial input from professional staff. Again, Merton had early experience of volunteer in libraries under the Lending Time Project where the organisation running the national pilot project, Community Service Volunteers (CSV), wanted its policy of accepting anybody who wishes to volunteer without regard to what value they would add to the library service as a library service. Thus while their perspectives was to get as many volunteers as possible into the scheme, Merton Library had a strict policy of taking volunteers who would not carry out jobs done by library staff, and could only be accepted if they came with specified skills to develop new services which had not been delivered in the past. Their role in such cases was that of catalyst who would start a new service which library staff would then take over as a “mainstream” activity”. Merton also found that time and effort training volunteers to do “library jobs” would be better used in training their own staff who could provide a long-term reservoir of skills to further develop services.

*

The QLP-Y started by investigating services to young people and examining their library and information-related needs. QLP-Y insisted on consulting young people about how they evaluated current services and sought views on services they needed. Options of possible developmental areas were explained and the ones which found favour with the young people were selected and delivered. Thus the service delivered was not what the service providers wanted to deliver, but what the service users needed and this formed the basis of a new needs-based service.

New services were developed and delivered in an active partnership with other Council Departments (e.g. Youth Service, Social services, Education) as well as with relevant community groups (e.g. Connections). The QLP approach was “management development through service development” implying that the two aspects were related to each other and that one could not be developed without developing the other. Thus staff and management development was

an important aspect addressed before services were developed. It encouraged a co-operative management style rather than the hierarchical one obtaining in public libraries. It encouraged a free flow of ideas among young people, staff, managers and the community as a whole. Thus in the case of Merton Library Service which pioneered the youth-run magazine, *the Merton Sense*, there was established the Innovations Unit which encouraged new ideas and experiences and provided appropriate guidance and leadership to staff.

The overall achievement of QLP-Y is summed by Hannah Richens, Barnet's Development Manager, Children and Education (Libraries):

QLP-Y has shown that positive service development and change at a strategic level is possible, and for relatively little financial outlay ... As a library service such partnerships have furnished us with new skills and new approaches to engaging young people. We are now more flexible in our approach to young people's events and much more open to the idea of young people shaping and managing events themselves. The benefits have extended far beyond the confines of the QLP-Y project itself. (Richens, Hannah, 2008).

It is again significant that the funding for the project came from a charity, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and not from local government itself, indicating a lack not only of resources, but a real commitment to developing services, particularly at a time when young people are increasingly marginalised in the European societies generally. It also indicated the "do not care" attitude of conservative librarians who did have the resources to develop the QLP-Y -type approach. It is also a failure of the Government that it saw no need to develop services to marginalised groups while seeking to carry out unthinkingly its programme of privatisation and market deregulation.

There is evidence that this progressive approach to developing new services had the support of communities, library staff as well as lower and middle managers. That it no longer exists indicates that it suffered from lack of support for a new, progressive approach. The QLP-Y's community-based and co-operative approach was perhaps seen as challenging the well-established hierarchies and power structures in the library service. There needs to be a major shift in

organisational culture and in power relations in libraries and local authorities for there to be any meaningful, long-term change.

Achievements of QLP-Y

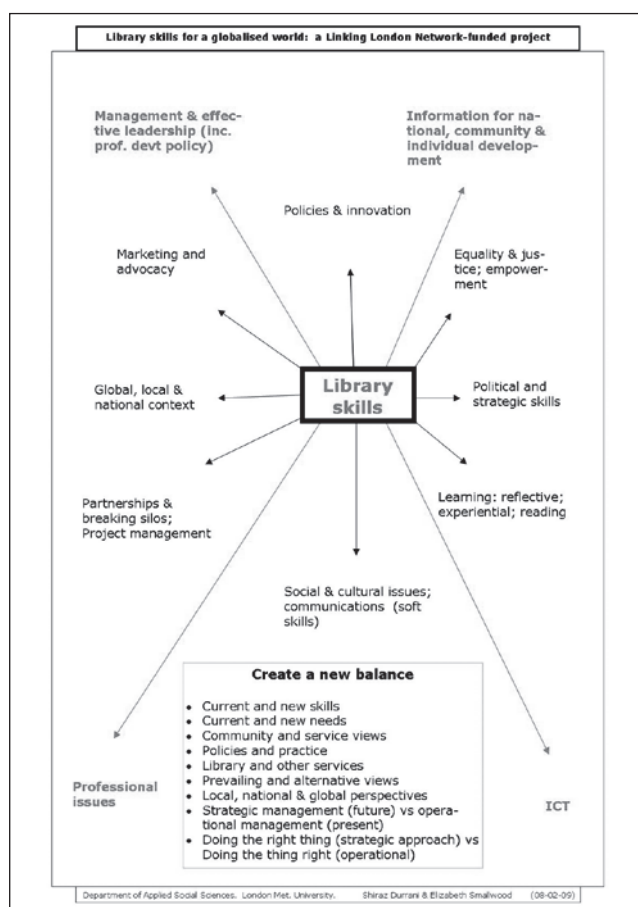
QLP-Y activities led to many achievements for young people and the Quality Leaders running projects; and also to an extent impacted on the organisations hosting activities. The main achievements were:

- skills and personal development of young people participating in activities (including social, leadership and subject-specific skills and increased self-esteem);
- ongoing commitment of many young people participating;
- young people engaging with QLP-Y beginning to trust library staff and see libraries as offering something for them;
- engaging young people who were not traditional users of library services;
- skills and personal development of staff leading QLP-Y activities (including project management, social skills, presentation and writing skills, subject knowledge and increased confidence to take on additional responsibilities);
- increased awareness within the wider authority of the value of delivering services that met young people's needs and aspirations;
- changes to the way in which services are delivered, including mainstreaming of some activities aimed at young people and a commitment to further provision for this age group;
- young people having a greater say in how services are delivered; and
- partnership development in some authorities.

Respondents were very positive about the added value from the programme, particularly in terms of the additional budget for equipment and facilitating activities with young people that would not normally have taken place. The gains for the young people and the potential longer-lasting impacts on them were of particular note

- EXTENDED EVALUATION OF QUALITY LEADERS PROJECT (YOUTH) INITIATIVE. Final report. Jane Pitcher and Mary Eastwood-Krah. October 2009.

Library skills for a globalised world



75: Library skills chart (2009)

Yet another initiative to provide relevant learning opportunities was through the Skills for a globalised world: relevant skills for public library staff Project. The first phase of the Project was undertaken at London Metropolitan University while the second one at the University of East London.⁶⁴

Durrani and Smallwood (2010) explain the scope of the London Metropolitan University-based first phase:

Skills for a globalised world: relevant skills for public library staff (Library Skills Project) is a project that has sought to develop a relevant learning programme that meets the needs of learners and employers in programmes at universities, with the specific aim of developing relevant learning opportunities for public library staff. The Project is funded by the Linking London Lifelong Learning Network (LLN), which aims to support the development and provision of more flexible and relevant degree level courses to meet employer needs within the London area and the project has thus focused consultation on the London public library sector and nationally important bodies within the public library field. Based in the Department of Applied Social Sciences at London Metropolitan University, the project has aimed to develop learning opportunities that will give public library staff the opportunity to develop further as reflective practitioners via an experiential learning approach, supported by academic study, whilst addressing the need for “new” skills development in a rapidly changing public library context.

The project has sought to develop outlines of a range of key modules that, informed by consultation, will address key skills gaps within the public library sector, thus benefiting the employer, the staff member and public library services more widely.

Module content reflects the changing nature of local authority services, government focus on leadership within the public sector and the need for change and innovation within the public library

⁶⁴ As with OLP and PALIAct, all the documents for the Library Skills Project are available at its Network-based site, http://www.seapn.org.uk/editorial.asp?page_id=69.

sector. There is no suggestion that the outline modules that have been developed represent a complete programme of librarian training, rather that they complement existing training and can be part of an updated and more relevant BA or MA course in Library and Information Management or can be used as stand-alone modules to address skills gaps within current or new workforces, allowing for individual development.

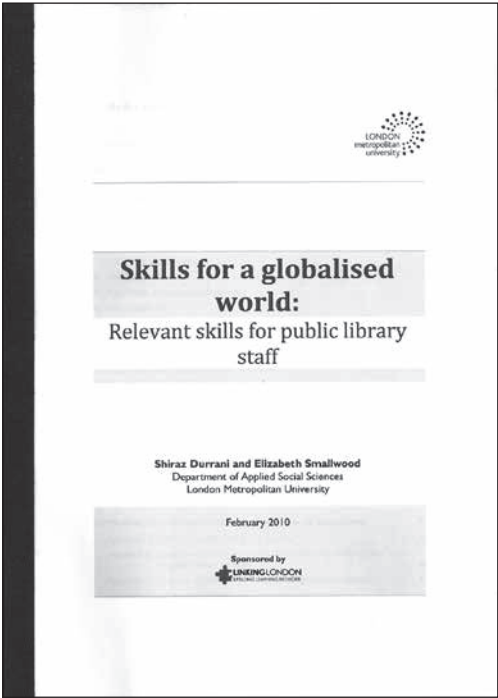
The modules focus on developing critical awareness of trends driving services and of organisational culture and factors helping/hindering the change process as well as the social dimension of information and library work. It is assumed that the teaching of the technical aspects (cataloguing, information retrieval, information literacy, ICT applications etc.) already provided on library and information studies courses will continue to be delivered by other modules.

An important aspect of the programme is that it ensures that students achieve academic credits on successful completion and this can be part of their CPD programme. Another is that the skills development is very closely linked to students' workplaces.

The authors' experiences with a previous project, Quality Leaders Project – Youth (QLP-Y) 1 have informed the design of the learning opportunities developed as part of this project. QLP-Y was a project running from 2005-2009 in 4 library authorities around England – London Boroughs of Barnet and Haringey, Lincolnshire County Council and Portsmouth City Council. Its aim was “management development through service development” i.e. participating staff devised and implemented a programme of service development initiatives, based upon consultation with the key client group, in this case youth. In so doing, they developed key management skills and became more reflective practitioners, championing change in their authorities.

The QLP-Y experience suggests that the combination of work-based learning, supported by an academic approach will lead to a significant level of skills development, unlikely with an entirely work-based or entirely university-based approach. By supporting staff to develop services/management skills within their own work-based context, learning opportunities aim at enhancing staff motivation and confidence and re-engaging workers with a learning agenda, facilitating further progression both academically and professionally.

The key outcomes of the project are the Library Skills Chart and outlines of recommended modules. Rather than “finished” works these are provided as guides to reflection and action to be amended and adapted to suit local need.



76: Library Skills project report (2010)

Following consultation with students, professionals as well as practitioners, the Project produced a “skills chart” identifying operational and strategic skills considered necessary to develop a progressive library service. In addition, the Project provided outlines schemes for key Modules considered necessary to impart these skills. The chart and Module details are reproduced below. It was initially intended that London Metropolitan University would run some of the Modules in the year 2011, but staffing changes and financial constraint meant that the programme had to be abandoned. However the University of East London was keen to take it up and a limited pilot programme became Phase 2 of the Library Skills Project.

Module outlines for the first phase of the Library Skills Project

Change management and leadership in public library services

Explores the dynamics of organisational change and leadership in meeting the challenges posed by globalisation in public library services. The module examines the concepts of “change management” and “effective leadership” and analyses the factors that hinder or enhance organisational change and service development. Students will have an opportunity to develop critical reflective practice by applying theories to practice.

Innovation and Development in Information Services

This module explores the contribution that innovation and effective leadership can make in ensuring that public library services play an active role in meeting the challenge of social development in the context of rapid globalisation.

Information, equality and social exclusion

Critically examines citizenship in the information society and the role that ICT, information and public library services can play in promoting social inclusion, equality and justice. There is critical consideration of social inclusion/equality policies and their impact on public library services and the information transfer process.

Public libraries, policy and information trends

Focuses on current social and information developments within the public library context. The debates around the processes that shape this development, along with the impact of globalisation on the public sector, are examined. The application of local authority policies and practice

in relation to meeting community information needs is considered and the role that public libraries can play in meeting community needs is fully explored.

Project management in public libraries

Focuses on developing students' ability to understand and apply principles of project management methodology to manage, control and organise a project to achieve agreed outcomes within a public library context. Students will have an opportunity to put theory into practice via work-based learning.

Library Skills pilot implementation (Phase 2)

This project was a pilot one and was devised specifically for library staff of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. The course was to be accredited by the University of East London following the pilot phase.

One Module was developed with the needs of the target students in mind. This was "Change management and leadership in public library services". The programme was delivered over ten weeks, with weekly sessions of three hours each. These sessions were divided into three parts: the first was a lecture on a specified topic; the second part was for student workshops and debates, with the third one a "learning and doing" practical session.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Further details on the Project are available in Durrani, S. (2011): Studies in progressive public librarianship: training for alternative service. *Progressive Librarian*. No. 36-37 (59-70).

Lecture & learning summary list

UELconnect, University of East London, Docklands campus
University Way, London E16 2RD
Rev. 18-09-10

Module title: Change management and leadership in public library services
<http://moodle.uelconnect.org.uk/course/view.php?id=64>
Skills project details: http://www.uelconnect.org.uk/editorial.asp?page_id=69

LECTURE TOPICS (one hour)

Week	Date	TOPIC
1	06-09-10	Introduction to the Module
2	13-09-10	Role and purpose of the public library
3	20-09-10	Public libraries and the search for relevance & justice
4	27-09-10	Achieving the vision of a just information society
5	04-10-10	Management & leadership in public libraries
6	11-10-10	Policy, planning and performance
7	18-10-10	Meeting information needs of people
8	25-10-10	Projects and co-production
9	01-11-10	The modernisation review of public libraries
10	08-11-10	Zohair Abbas: LBBAD Libraries: policies & priorities
11	15-11-10	Innovation & change: the power of "correct" ideas
Additional session		- Support and guidance session for completing assignment - Gurdeep Sandhu, Associate Director, Library and Learning Services, University of East London: "Meeting student needs at UEL at a time of rapid change"

Coursework submission: 29-11-10 (see: P.7)

STUDENT WORKSHOPS & DEBATES (one hour)
Students will be divided into 2 groups. Groups will prepare in advance and present their ideas on the topic of the week to the whole class. The purpose is to generate debate, discussion and reflection.

Week	Date	Topic
1	06-09-10	Current debates in public library services (set task)
2	13-09-10	Investigating communities - how and what (short session followed by "investigating communities" bus ride)
3	20-09-10	Reports from "investigating community" bus ride: lessons
4	27-09-10	Analyse changes in social life in the last 10 years
5	04-10-10	Library dreams (1): The Dark Angel experience

6	11-10-10	Investigate possible library partners within & outside B&D
7	18-10-10	Staff & community empowerment exercise
8	25-10-10	Your experiences of "good" and successful library services, policies & practices. What made them "good" & successful?
9	01-11-10	Group exercise: Planning a service "fit for purpose"
10	08-11-10	Innovation & change case studies

* "On June 1, 2009, months after Max's escape, terrorists detonate an electromagnetic pulse weapon in the atmosphere over the U.S., which destroys the vast majority of computer and communication systems, throwing the country into utter chaos".
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_Angel_TV_series]. Discuss in groups how London residents would survive in the absence of computers and communication systems and present group views to the class.

Learning by doing (one hour)
These sessions will include guest speakers and visits to places of interest/relevant to the Module outcomes.

Week	Date	Topic
1	06-09-10	Library dreams (2): Design a relevant, "equal" library
2	13-09-10	"Investigating local communities" bus ride - group reports to be presented in Workshops & Debates Week 3
3	20-09-10	UEL Docklands Library (cancelled)
4	27-09-10	Paul Hogan, Head of Service for Leisure
5	04-10-10	UEL Docklands Library visit
6	11-10-10	Richard Sved, M&A
7	18-10-10	Waterstones in Ilford
8	25-10-10	Tim Coates
9	01-11-10	Management Forum (LBBAD management answer student questions)
10	08-11-10	Guest speaker suggested (by Week 4) by students: Speakers from B&D health authority, policy/performance, Harmony House to form a discussion panel
11	15-11-10	Additional session - Support and guidance session for completing assignment - Gurdeep Sandhu, Associate Director, Library and Learning Services, University of East London: "Meeting student needs at UEL at a time of rapid change"

77: Change Management & leadership Module programme

Information, Society & Justice Journal



Information, Society & Justice
 Volume 2 No. 2, June 2009; ISSN 1756-1078 (Online)

Special Issue
Trade Union & working class struggles

Editors
Shiraz Durrani
Usman A. Tar

78: Information Society & Justice. Vol. 2 No. 2 (2009)

The teaching programme at London Metropolitan University went beyond the “normal” teaching of set Modules and coursework. A number of ways were devised to provide additional experience to students to enhance their learning programme and provide practical experience in areas which are not necessarily covered in formal learning. One such was the establishment of an online journal, *Information, Society and Justice*. The journal explains its scope:

Information Society and Justice (ISJ) is a biannual peer-review journal based in the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences (DASS) at the London Metropolitan University.

The journal is governed by an Editorial Board drawn from UK and overseas. It seeks to provide a proactive space for critical discussion of the issues around information, society and justice. It focuses on a diverse range of issues including - but not limited to - development, equality, human rights, inclusion, justice, liberation and democracy.

ISJ publishes original research, including work in progress. It also publishes debates, reflections, book/film reviews, reports and briefings on varied issues and from a diverse range of institutions and individuals. It is not limited to any one disciplinary perspective and will accept contributions from academics, policy practitioners and activists.

The first issue came out in December 2007 and has continued publishing twice a year ever since. It is available at www.londonmet.ac.uk/isj. Professor Gabriel highlights an important feature of the journal:

... the journal has an explicit social purpose. These days, few make the assumption that the growth in both the volume and global reach of information guarantee greater democracy and social justice. Information is never neutral and this journal has clearly nailed its colours to the mast in harnessing information to the safeguarding of human rights and the promotion of social equality. (ISJ 1 (1) December 2007, p. 1).

The formal launch of the journal took place in May 2008. It was to provide a wider perspective and expand horizons that ISJ was set up. This is an important teaching outcome that training in librarianship needs to address seriously.

Teaching and learning progressive librarianship

The key information battle waged by the financial market capitalism involves taking control of people's minds and to influence their world outlook, so all they see is a world of TINA (there is no alternative) to the capitalist unequal division of national and world wealth. TINA has created a world where "93 per cent of the \$288bn in new US growth [goes] to the top 1 per cent". (Eaton, 2012). It is necessary, from the perspectives of the corporations, in order to maintain this level of inequality for people to see this situation as "natural" and normal as well as unchangeable. Otherwise, people might get "dangerous" ideas of creating a society based on principles of equality and justice. The campaign by drug and medical corporations against any form of "equal" medical care for the 40 million people in USA who are not provided any medical care over the recent healthcare legislation was couched in the language of "people's right to free choice", yet its very opposite is the truth. The medical lobby is so powerful in USA (and in the capitalist world generally) that it is not possible for any progressive legislation providing care at the point of need to be passed.

Similarly, corporations need to ensure that people remain passive about mass starvation and unnecessary deaths among working people, so information and examples of resistance to economic exploitation and social oppression are suppressed.

Information in the mass media is used to provide a blinkered picture of social reality, particularly about power relations in the society. Nor is resistance by people, for example in Spain, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, reported adequately or at all on British news media. Nor is the repression of Palestine by Israel. Nor the bloody hands of the West in supporting the Syrian "freedom fighters".

The education system is also used to disengage people from the reality around them, particularly the social aspects which are distorted

or hidden. The world is shown generally from a capitalist perspective. Alternative perspectives, when examined or even mentioned at all, are shown in negative terms.

It is not only in general education in countries such as Britain, USA and Kenya that significant social events and social dynamics are hidden or their role downplayed by the education system as well as by mass media and other information agencies. This is also the case in the library field generally, but also in the graduate and post graduate training programmes for library and information professionals. This trend to emphasise technical aspects and underplay social aspects is partly driven by employment opportunities available to new professionals. While there is a definite need for technical skills in the profession, relatively few employers want their staff to be aware of their social context as this may give rise to “troublemakers” and whistle-blowers” who can upset their plans to acquire evermore power and profits.

The increasing marketization of the education sector in Britain is likely to create a library curriculum with even less focus on social aspects. Already questions have been raised, for example by Durrani (2008a), about the implementation of the Equality and Diversity policy as far as curriculum for information professionals is concerned at one University. The drive to privatisation in Britain also means that profit-seeking “educationalists” will decide on the curricula, as well as all aspects of the education – all with state subsidies.

But resistance to neo-liberal policies championed by educational institutions is in evidence in many parts of the world, ranging from student protests in Chile to students of Manchester University. It is worth examining the latter as the teaching programmes of economists has much in common with the teaching programme for librarians. The economics students at Manchester University have taken a firm stand to demand a relevant teaching programme, as Inman (2013) shows:

Now a growing band of university students are plotting a quiet revolution against orthodox free-market teaching, arguing that alternative ways of thinking have been pushed to the margins ... Earle (Joe Earle, a spokesman for the Post-Crash Economics Society) said: “students across Britain were being

taught neoclassical economics 'as if it was the only theory'. It is given such a dominant position in our modules that many students aren't even aware that there are other distinct theories out there that question the assumptions, methodologies and conclusions of the economics we are taught... As a consequence, economics students never develop the faculties necessary to critically question, evaluate and compare economic theories, and enter the working world with a false belief about what economics is and a knowledge base limited to neoclassical theory."

Students of librarianship have some time to go before they challenge their teaching programmes in a similar way.

The question then arises: what type of library education is required in an age of globalisation, marketisation and privatisation of educational institutions? It should be recognised, at the onset, that the education sector as a whole is under attack from forces of capitalism and any progressive action is likely to be under attack. Just as in the public libraries, University teaching also requires waging guerrilla warfare against the ever-increasing free marketeers disguised as "educationalists". But the battle has to be waged if the future of libraries as public service is to be preserved.

Library training

An important requirement for success of the progressive librarianship experiences discussed in this book is the need to teach and learn from library workers as well as members of the public. The underpinning thought was that correct ideas and practices for a specific time and place are not locked in library vaults, but need to be developed in discussions with the public whose information and learning needs must first of all be investigated before possible solutions can be offered. Similarly, staff, particularly front-line and those without power to influence policies, have much knowledge developed through experience that the conservative system ignores, thus depriving library services of valuable input for developing a relevant service. Thus the start of a progressive library service is to investigate local and national communities. This requires the development of research and

investigation skills and experience.

The information collected in the above investigation needs to be seen in an overall context of theories and ideas developed professionally. Thus the need is for theory to inform practice and practice to inform theory in a never ending cycle of ideas and practice, of learning and putting into practice.

In addition, progressive librarianship recognises that the ideas and practices developed need to be taught more widely not only to expand the scope of progressive librarianship, but also as a way of passing on valuable information and knowledge to a new generation of information workers, for without such an approach, ideas and practices, however relevant and useful, would not survive over a long period of time.

For such a progressive approach to succeed there was a need to develop links between formal academic learning, informal learning and professional practice. There are very few connections of this sort within the conservative teaching and library services, but has always been important for progressive librarianship.

Below we examine some examples of how this teaching and learning battle was waged in Kenya and in Britain.

Kenya

The situation in Kenya described in this book deals with library work within its political context. It should be remembered that teaching and learning was a central political aim of the December Twelve Movement (DTM). This was essential for the movement at two levels: first, it was necessary to train cadres as activists in the process of political change that the organisation wanted to bring about; second, it needed to communicate directly with the working people so as to learn about their lives, struggles and needs and also to pass on a progressive world outlook to them, particularly to show alternatives to capitalism which had failed to meet the needs of the majority of Kenyan people. Within the overall political movement, the Library Cell, as part of the DTM, had the same teaching and learning aims, but at an informal level. It added these aspects to the particular field of information, communication, knowledge and libraries. The teaching and learning programmes of the DTM remain beyond the scope of this book, but some of its communica-

tions aspects are covered in many of its own documents.

The Library Cell used a number of teaching and learning activities to meet its aims. These included "one to one" or group study sessions. These helped to develop selected recruits to become activists and provided opportunities to be more aware of the political situation in the country as well as in the world. Such learning also provided opportunities for the organisation to learn from experiences of its members and their communities, thus enabling an appropriate political strategy to be developed. The Library Cell cadres then helped in organising various activities of the Cell. These included library workshops mentioned earlier. These were in effect study classes for library workers and their ideas and experiences were given a new validity by being published in the *Sauti ya Wakutubi*.

Yet another activity that the Library Cell members were active in was in theatre which was used as a mass education process, with working people's active participation in all aspects: script writing, acting and producing. The two aspects of such activities were the technical aspects of production and the content which was anti-imperialist so as to create greater awareness among the audience. Many Library Cell members were also active at the Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre which provided valuable ideas and experience in information communication. They also produced and acted in other plays produced with other DTM Cells such as Maitu Njugira, Portraits of survival, dealing with lives of Nairobi street children who were also the actors in the play.⁶⁶ The Library Cell also produced *Kinjikitile, Maji Maji* in partnership with Takhto Arts, a City theatre group. Such activities provided useful training for activists and also provided ideas about how information flows in society and how it can be harnessed to meet people's needs – something that few library schools provide.

The primary library activity of the Library Cell, besides the Workshops, was the production of the *University of Nairobi Library Magazine* with its offshoot, the creative wing, *Sehemu ya Utungaji*. Both of these were aimed primarily at teaching and learning – new ideas, greater awareness, knowing Kenyan and world history from

⁶⁶ For further details on theatre in Kenya, see Kerr, David (1995): *African Popular Theatre: From Pre-Colonial Times to the Present Day*. London: James Currey.

a working class perspective. In addition they provided a forum of expressing new ideas and meeting like-minded individuals and groups. In the days before the Internet and mobile phones, this form of communication was extremely important in combating the prevailing conservative approach of TINA (There is No Alternative) to the conservative ways of managing information in society. They provided an alternative method of thinking and communicating. But they also provided opportunities of becoming active in the social and political struggles and provided organisational and management experience as well.

London – Hackney

As we saw earlier, the teaching and learning aspects of the library work was through organising relevant library services, such as the TCLC. Here, the organisational framework was provided by the Black Workers Group whose monthly meetings became important arena for teaching and learning about the issues related to politics of information, the role of racism in social and political life, as well as methods of addressing cases of institutional and individual racism prevalent in the library service.

The issue of power in addressing social and political problems facing an oppressed race or class were also areas considered relevant by progressive librarianship. This was clearer in the case in Kenya, and though less clear in London, the power that the BWG gave its members was there for all to see. This was supplemented later with the formation of BSG which became a school of acquiring professional and political skills through experience and intensive coaching. Both these stood against institutions and attitudes created by conservative librarianship and their very existence provided opportunities to learn that alternative methods of doing things *were* possible, that there are co-operative alternatives to capitalist hierarchy and dictatorship.

Another learning programme introduced was the setting up of a formal programme of acquiring Library NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) although it did not go far as key people working on it left Hackney.

To all Library staff

Want to get qualified?

**Library NVQs
come to Hackney at last!**

* Would you like a qualification that recognises all the skills you use in your day to day work?

* NVQs stand for National Vocational Qualification and will be the key qualification in libraries in the future.

* Library NVQs are aimed at anyone whose role involves providing information and a library service, regardless of whether you have any formal qualifications. * NVQs currently come in three different levels: 1-3 and are based on your actual work. * Acquiring NVQs does not lead to promotion, but may help when you apply for higher posts.

Want to know more?

Hackney is working with LB Newham, Tower Hamlet, Havering and Waltham Forest in conjunction with London East Training and Enterprise Council on a pilot project to offer NVQs to Library staff. DELS is providing Hackney's cost towards this project. **Jane Stauch**, Learning Resources Manager for Richmond Upon Thames College which is an approved assessment centre, has been appointed as a consultant for the project. She will also provide training, assessment and accreditation for assessors.

How does it work?

1. NVQ awareness day for interested staff
November 14, 1996 Stamford Hill Library
9.00 - 11.30 a.m.

Open to all interested staff. Jane Stauch will explain how NVQs work and what is involved. There is no commitment to take up NVQs at this stage. Names of those who decide to go for NVQs (a limited number of places available in the first year) will be finalised in consultation with Roy Myers, DELS Training Co-ordinator after the awareness day. The actual project starts in January 1997 for a period of about 9 months.

All those wishing to attend should let Shiraz know before November 7th.

2. Selection of two Assessors

Assessors will receive training and will supervise those who take up NVQs.

All staff interested in being assessors (SO1 and above) should let Shiraz know by November 7th. (ext. 5157)

79: NVQ training at Hackney Libraries

London - Merton

While the informal teaching and learning traditions used in Hackney continued in Merton, this was supplemented by semi-official learning. With funds received from the European Social Fund (ESF), a programme for professional and management development for all levels of staff was developed in partnership with the Management Research Centre of the London Metropolitan University which was also actively involved in developing the Quality Leaders Programme (QLP) with its own active programme of formal and informal learning. The management development programme saw formal sessions conducted by management consultants and were aimed to provide new skills for meeting new challenges.

The informal learning was continued through the development of the Staff Development and the Innovation Unit which organised

sessions where new ideas and experiences could be presented and debated. At the same time, the Projects approach provided new opportunities for staff to develop new skills and experience to approach librarianship from a new, progressive perspective. Intensive coaching and learning from experience were part of the new system developed.

London Metropolitan University

Department of Applied Social Sciences

The long-term sustenance of progressive librarianship depends on it acquiring legitimacy as a study area equal in status to conservative librarianship. It would then be the case that students and practitioners would select whichever system they judge is the best one in meeting the vision of a library service. There would then be an equal playing field where the best system would become dominant. But conservative librarianship, using all the open and hidden power it commands has kept progressive librarianship out of the classroom, even censoring *information* about its existence and achievements. Progressive librarianship has to forcefully enter classrooms if it is going to have an impact on new and young professionals. This section looks at one such attempt in the teaching of MA in Information Services Management in the Department of Applied Social Sciences⁶⁷ at the London Metropolitan University.

Curricula development

The teaching and learning experiences mentioned above were at an informal level. The situation changed from 2005 when formal, academic and professional teaching at the London Metropolitan University became possible. This involved re-defining the existing teaching Modules as well as creating new ones to ensure that ideas of progressive librarianship were incorporated in teaching. At the same time experiential learning was reinforced to promote progressive librarianship practices. The following section looks at the programme offered in the “social aspects” Modules for the study of MA in Information Services Management (MA-ISM).

⁶⁷ Now the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities.

Rationale

Progressive librarianship needs to keep changing the course curricula as the situation changes. This was done at the MA(ISM) course at London Metropolitan University. The last 20-30 years have seen substantial social and technical developments and these changes needed to be reflected in the learning and teaching programme at the University. Only then can the requirements of changing needs in the workplace and as expressed in various policy initiatives at national and international levels be met. Key developments which required curricula to be changed included rapid globalisation and development of the Information Society; the need to ensure reflective learning among students; the need to develop effective leadership skills; the need to innovate in order to meet changing needs and workforce development to meet new challenges as an on-going process.

While developments in technological aspects of the information and knowledge development are generally well developed, important social aspects often lag behind if the teaching and learning programmes do not keep pace with developments and social trends. As the need for skills in the market changes, University teaching was in danger of becoming less attractive if it did not provide the required skills.

Prof. Hepworth⁶⁸ provided an important lesson on what changes were needed to be made in training programmes of library schools when he said that “the emphasis [for public libraries] should shift to whether libraries help governments promote their wider health, educational and social objectives”. (Quoted in Ezard, 2005). Thus information services are expected to play a key role in this shift in society. At the international level, the demands were also being made on libraries and curricula needed to respond to these. Thus the World Summit on the Information Society's (WSIS) Action Plan set “time-bound targets to turn the vision of an inclusive and equitable Information Society into reality”. At WSIS Geneva in December 2003, World leaders declared “our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve

⁶⁸ Prof Hepworth headed the think-tank Local Futures Group and was a visiting professor of economic geography at Birkbeck College, London.

their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

At a wider, global level, there had been a rapid economic and hence political, rise of the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China). In such a rapidly changing situation, it is essential that Universities help Britain maintain its competitive edge in the world. This can be best done by developing a stronger information and knowledge society.

It was to these and similar challenges that the teaching and learning programmes at the London Metropolitan University responded by making key changes and additions. One such development was the introduction of a new Module “Information for Development” which explored theories and practices in this area of information as a development tool within an overall concept of equality and justice. Another new Module was “Innovation and development in information services” which examined the role of leadership and the need for introducing organisational change within the context of meeting “developmental” needs of individuals, communities, and countries.

“Information and Social Exclusion” was yet another Module which was previously offered as an undergraduate Module to students in sociology but an-MA level Module was now added. This looked at issues of social justice in the context of exclusion from information. At the same time, Projects also based in the Department, such as such as the “Quality Leaders Project - Youth” (QLP-Y) and the “Progressive African Library and Information Activists’ Group (PALIAct)” and the Library Skills Project helped to bridge the gap between theory and practice, between ideas and action, between the academic world and real workplaces. A brief outline of the new and revised Modules is given below to indicate the range of areas that the new teaching programme sought to address.

Module: Society, Information and Policy

The development of the information society and the regulatory environment which has evolved as a result was the focus of this module. The disparities in the information society were examined, both global and national and the projects and policies which have

emerged to reduce these differences were evaluated. The application of information policies in organisations were considered and the role that information plays in citizenship was explored.

Module: Information and Social Exclusion

This Module explored issues of diversity and cultural pluralism in the context of provision of information and library services.

Module: Information for Development

This Module examined critically the central role of information as a tool of development, placing information in the context of social justice, seeing information as a basic human right the lack of which retards social, personal and national development.

Module: Innovation and Development in Information Services

This module explored the contribution that innovation and effective leadership can make in ensuring that information services play an active role in meeting the challenge of social development in the context of rapid globalisation.

Incorporating “progressive” in the teaching programme

A plea is made in this book that all library teaching and learning programmes should incorporate aspects of progressive librarianship in curricula. Such a process was begun at the London Metropolitan University. It was by no means a comprehensive changing over of the teaching programme, but some elements were introduced in the “social aspects” Modules as and when conditions allowed. At one level, elements of progressive librarianship were incorporation in the Projects listed in the section “National and International Initiatives” sections under Part 2 above. At the same time, lectures and student learning activities at London Metropolitan University and at the University of East London reflected progressive elements. Also given strong emphasis was the aspect of student’s active involvement in

debates, discussion and critical assessments of library policies and practices. Some examples of these are listed below:

Module: Society, Information & Policy (2009-10) - designed for MA in Library Services Management at London Metropolitan University. Lectures included the following topics. Note that related and relevant readings were also provided for each lecture:

- Politics of information in the 21st Century
- Public libraries, equality and justice
- The struggle for alternative information & society
- + weekly student debates

Module title: Change management and leadership in public library services - designed for library staff at the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, at the University of East London.

Lectures

- Public libraries and the search for relevance & justice
- Achieving the vision of a just information society
- Meeting information needs of people

Student workshops and debates (weekly)

- Investigating communities – how and what (short session followed by “investigating communities” bus ride).
- Reports from “investigating community” bus ride: lessons
- Library dreams (1): The Dark Angel experience
- Analyse changes in social life in the last 10 years
- Staff & community empowerment exercise
- Group exercise: Planning a service “fit for purpose”
- Innovation & change case studies.

While this was a small start in teaching progressive librarianship, it nevertheless provided valuable lessons in developing relevant curricula for progressive librarianship.

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Teaching and Learning

Social Information Modules

The Department of Applied Social Sciences (DASS) offers a number of Modules exploring the social aspects of information. They are offered as part of the Information Services Management (ISM) MA course. This also includes a number of related teaching and learning initiatives.

Rationale

There have been substantial social and technical developments in recent times. These changes need to be reflected in the learning and teaching environment so as to meet the changing needs in the workplace as expressed in various policy initiatives at national and international levels. Key developments can be summed up as:

- Rapid globalisation and development of the Information Society
- The need to ensure reflective learning among students
- The need to develop effective leadership skills
- The need to innovate in order to meet changing needs
- Workforce development to meet new challenges as an on-going process.

While developments in technological aspects of the information and knowledge development are generally well developed, important social aspects may lag behind, unless teaching and learning programmes keep pace. As the need for skills in the market changes, University teaching is in danger of becoming less attractive if it does not provide the required skills.

At the national level, the Modernising Government White Paper, 1999 highlighted the central role of policies in translating political vision into programmes and actions to deliver 'outcomes' - 'desired changes in the real world'. (Modernising Government White Paper, 1999).

Prof. Hepworth sees the need for change in the role of public libraries: 'the emphasis (for public libraries) should shift to whether libraries help governments promote their wider health, educational and social objectives'.

Information services are expected to play a key role in this shift in society. This is underpinned by legislative requirements such as the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Human Rights Act (1998) and the establishment of the Commission on Equality and Human Rights.

At the international level, the World Summit on the Information Society's (WSIS) Action Plan 'sets time-bound targets to turn the vision of an inclusive and equitable Information Society into reality'. At WSIS Geneva in December 2003, World leaders declared 'our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.'

At a wider, global level, recent change has seen the rapid economic and hence political, rise of the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China). South and East Asia are fast becoming the engine rooms of the world, with China already having overtaken Britain as the fourth largest economy in the world. In such a rapidly changing situation, it is essential that Universities help Britain maintain its competitive edge in the world. This can be best done by developing a stronger information and knowledge society. Prof. Hepworth explains the role that libraries and information services need to play:

But while there have been success stories such as the MLA-managed The People's Network... Hepworth thinks that the Internet is 'not the same as knowledge. Knowledge is converting that information into something of economic or social value. That's what libraries are there to do and I think more can be built up around the web'.

... Hepworth thinks that libraries 'should be a showcase for the global economy. I can't see another place that can do it'. If only more people realised.

These DASS initiatives also seeks to address an important gap in the teaching and learning programmes in the information management sector. This is in relation to the fundamental question: 'what is information for?' Too often this question is not even raised, or if raised, no coherent answers are explored. Different people with different interests and perspectives respond to this in different ways. The Module 'Information for Development' explores theories and practices in this area and will also include the aspect of social and human justice within its remit. A new module just introduced - 'Information and development in information services' - examines the role of leadership and the need for introducing organisational change within the context of meeting 'developmental' needs of individuals, communities, and countries. 'Information and Social Exclusion' looks at issues of social justice in the context of exclusion from information. Projects such as the 'Quality Leaders Project - Youth' (QLP-Y) and the 'Progressive African Library and Information Activists' Group (PALIACT) help to bridge the gaps between theory and practice, between ideas and action, between the academic world and real workplaces.

Students, and sometimes employers, may not always be fully aware of the changing needs in a changing world. Nor would they always be in a position to decide what steps are necessary to bring about the desired changes and outcomes.

It thus falls on Universities to have a long term view and vision of the learning and teaching needs that a society faces in order to ensure national and personal well being. It is their responsibility to

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80: Social information teaching at London Met. University

DASS Debates & Lectures



81: DASS Debates & Lectures: TU, democracy & working class

Besides the ISJ Journal, yet another programme was developed to enhance student learning. This was a series of public events, open to students from all Faculties, aimed at creating a space for debate and discussion. These not only provided an avenue for students to meet and discuss ideas across a range of disciplines, but also help to connect them, as well as the Department as a whole, to members of the public who also had an opportunity to meet academics and students. This was one way to break walls between the academic world the world around it. An advantage of these activities was that it could include political aspects of information and other subjects not normally given much prominence in many courses. The papers and discussions were recorded and made available in the University Library, and speakers were encouraged to submit their papers to ISJ for publication.

The publicity for the series of Debates and Lectures gives further information:

DASS [Department of Applied Social Sciences] holds a series of public debates and lecture to highlight the contribution of leaders, movements and ideas that have shaped the world.

Many of these have been forgotten, marginalised or deliberately hidden from public view. People everywhere are increasingly using new possibilities created by forces of Information and Communications Technologies to liberate their minds and using alternative ideas to shape a new world where people are at peace with people. Information about emerging ideas and social movements around the world can now be shared instantaneously.

DASS Debates and lectures aim to create a place to think, to debate and develop ideas so as to raise awareness about issues and ideas that are changing the face of the world today. The series aims to provide a forum for visiting and resident speakers to present and discuss their work in a variety of fields. Sound recordings and hand-outs of the DASS Debates and Lectures are available in Ladbroke House Library.

It is interesting to see the range of topics and speakers who took part in the programme. A list of the discussions and presentation for the years 2006-07 and 2007-08 is reproduced below. This indicates that the remit of progressive librarianship and of its teaching programme is much wider than the one it has been given by conservative librarianship. It seeks to provide wider social issues, including the political aspects, as a "normal" work for a library. In addition, it emphasised that it was very much a part of the learning process that library staff and students do not just get "lectured at" by "library experts" but need to be actively engaged with through debates and discussions on social issues.

DASS Debates & Lectures

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DASS Debates & Lectures

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All lectures are **free of charge**. For current listings go to our Events page

Please **RSVP** to dasslectures@londonmet.ac.uk

Please send any suggestions you have for future events to Shiraz Durranzi: s.durranzi@londonmet.ac.uk

Past events

For information on past events, go to the DASS Debates & Lectures Archive

Sound Recordings

Sound recordings and Handouts of the DASS Debates and Lectures are available in Ladbroke House Library. Check the library catalogue under **DASS Debates**

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 University Intranet for
 Students and Staff






82: DASS Debates & Lectures at London Metropolitan University



Professor John Gabriel Head of the Department of Applied Social Sciences would like to invite you to a lecture

Dr. F. M. Bhatti
 Former Director (Research & Resources), ILEA; Honorary Research Fellow, London Metropolitan University, and author of an authoritative biography of Sir Ganga Ram

Sir Ganga Ram: champion of women's cause, founder of educational institutions, and welfare homes

Chair: Gerald Hine, Assistant Provost, former City of London Polytechnic, then London Guildhall University, now London Metropolitan University

Wednesday 13 June 2007, 6.00 – 9.00 pm

Other speakers:

- o Professor W. Monali, Dept. of Law, SOAS
- o Dr S. Sankar, Chairman Area Studies, SOAS
- o Dr P. Ramani, Lecturer, Anthropology, SOAS
- o Professor Armin Maghat, Academic, Journalist
- o Dr. Ann Williams, Former Academic, History Dept (North London University)

Room SH209
 Stapleton House
 London Metropolitan University
 277-281 Holloway Road
 London N7 8JL



RSVP Email: DassLectures@londonmet.ac.uk Nearest tube station: Holloway Road (Precedely line)

Professor John Gabriel Head of the Department of Applied Social Sciences would like to invite you to lectures on

Trade Unions, democracy and working class struggles in Africa

- Prof. Piyo Rattansi: Makhani Singh and the TU movement in Kenya
- Dr. Usman A. Tar: Organised labour and democratic struggle in Nigeria
- Chris Coates: Sources in the TUC Library Collections at London Metropolitan University for the study of the African Labour Movement

Chaired by Prof. John Gabriel

Wednesday 25 April 2007: 6.00–9.00 pm

Room SH209 Stapleton House
 London Metropolitan University
 277-281 Holloway Road, London N7 8JL

RSVP Email: DassLectures@londonmet.ac.uk Nearest tube station: Holloway Road (Precedely line)

83: DASS Debates & Lecture events



Professor John Gabriel Head of the Department of Applied Social Sciences would like to invite you to a lecture by

Professor Vernellia R. Randall
 Author of *Dying while Black* •

Prof. Randall speaks on disparities in health and health care for minorities in USA

Chaired by Prof. Eileen O'Keefe

Monday 19 November 2007, 6.00 – 8.00pm
 including questions & discussion, followed by book-signing



Room TG-30
 Tower Building
 London Metropolitan University
 166-220 Holloway Road
 London N7 8DB

RSVP: Email: DassLectures@londonmet.ac.uk
 Nearest tube station: Holloway Road (Piccadilly line)

* Website: <http://dyingwhileblack.org>



Professor John Gabriel Head of the Department of Applied Social Sciences would like to invite you to a lecture to mark

International Women's Day 2007

Struggles of South Asian women in Britain

Dr. Amrit Wilson
 Author of *Dreams, questions, struggles: South Asian women in Britain*

Chaired by Sukhwant Dhaliwal
Wednesday 28 March, 6.00 – 9.00 pm

Presentations

- Antonia Byatt: Using collections and resources at The Women's Library
- Sukhwant Dhaliwal: Working Lives Research Institute

Room SH209
 Stapleton House
 London Metropolitan University
 277-281 Holloway Road
 London N7 8JL

RSVP: Email: DassLectures@londonmet.ac.uk Nearest tube station: Holloway Road (Piccadilly line)
<http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/department/apss/home.htm>



Strategic Planning in London

Professor John Gabriel Head of the Department of Applied Social Sciences would like to invite you to a seminar with lectures by:

Professor Robin Thompson
 The Future of a Global City

And

Duncan Bowie
 The Plan's impact on housing development

Chaired by Professor John Gabriel

Wednesday 30th January, 6-9pm
 (Including questions and discussion)

Henry Thomas Room
 Tower Building
 London Metropolitan University
 166-220 Holloway Road
 London N7 8DB

RSVP: Email: DassLectures@londonmet.ac.uk
 Nearest tube station: Holloway Road (Piccadilly line)



Free Our Information:
 Promoting alternative information, news and ideas

Journal Launch:
Information, Society and Justice

Thursday 1st May 2008

1



Professor John Gabriel Head of the Department of Applied Social Sciences would like to invite you to an evening of lectures and discussion on:

Makhan Singh and the struggle for trade union rights in Kenya



Makhan Singh (1913-1973)

"Kenya's trade union movement has always been a part of the her national struggle for resisting British imperialist colonial rule, for winning national independence, for consolidating the independence after winning it, and for bringing prosperity to the workers and peoples of Kenya"

- Makhan Singh (1969)

Wednesday 17 February 2010

6.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.

Speakers:

Shiraz Durrani: Political significance of Makhan Singh in Kenya

Amarjit Chandan: What Makhan Singh means to me

Inderjit Jabbal-Gill: Makhan Singh, the family man [*Inderjit is Makhan Singh's daughter*]

Prof. John Gabriel: Chair

Henry Thomas Room (TG-30) Tower Building
London Metropolitan University, 166-220 Holloway Road, London N7 8DB
RSVP: email dasslectures@londonmet.ac.uk
Website: www.londonmet.ac.uk/dasslectures

DASS Debates & Lectures

Department of Applied Social Sciences

London Metropolitan University

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The place to be at each month
People and ideas shaping the world
2006-07

Date	Speakers	Chair	Title	Recording / Handouts
10-05-06	Professor Dharendra Sharma	Tony Benn	Science and culture: discussion on the issues of knowledge development and belief systems	Yes
07-06-06	Professor Gus John	Professor John Gabriel	Taking a Stand: Gus John Speaks on education, race, social action and civil unrest 1980 -2005	-
20-11-06	Sabur Ali Sayyid		Working Mothers: issues and policies in the UK: lessons for Pakistan	-
22-11-06	Shiraz Durrani; Amrit Wilson	Prof. Piyo Rattansi	Book launch: Durrani: <i>Never be silent; publishing and imperialism in Kenya, 1884-1963</i> (2006)	Yes
28-03-06	Amrit Wilson Antonia Byatt Sukhwant Dhaliwal	Sukhwant Dhaliwal	International Women's Day event: Struggles of the South Asian Women in Britain Antonia Byatt: Using collections and resources at The Women's Library Sukhwant Dhaliwal: Working Lives Research Institute	Yes
25-04-06	Prof. Piyo Rattansi Dr. Usman Tar Christine Coates	John Gabriel	Trade Unions, democracy and working class struggles in Africa Prof. Piyo Rattansi: Makhan Singh and the TU movement in Kenya Dr. Usman Tar: Organised labour and democratic struggle in Nigeria Chris Coates: TUC Library at London Met	Yes
02-05-06	Norman Ginsburg Kieron Hatton Sue Lawrence	Karen Lyons	(1) Norman Ginsburg: 'Whither or wither Social Europe?' (2) Kieron Hatton: 'Understanding Social Pedagogy' (3) Sue Lawrence: 'Taking forward the European Project'	-
14-05-06	Tamsin Bradley	Eileen O'Keeffe	Challenging the NGOs: women, religion and western dialogues in India. London, NY: IB Tauris (2006)	-
13-06-07	F. M. Bhatti	Gerald Hine	Sir Ganga Ram and his work on Hindu widows	Yes

* Recordings of these are available in Ladbroke House Library 1st Floor, 62-66

- Highbury Grove, London, N5 2AD. Tel. 020 7133 5149. For copies, please write to DassLectures@londonmet.ac.uk.
- For further information or suggestions for future debates & lectures, please contact Shiraz Durrani at s.durrani@londonmet.ac.uk.

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Department of Applied Social Sciences. London Metropolitan University

<http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/depts/dass/research/information/societyandjustice/debatesandlectures.cfm>Further information: DassLectures@londonmet.ac.uk.

People and ideas shaping the world

Programme 2007-08

Date/venue	Speakers/ event	Title
24-10-07	Black History Month	The Last Slave - Paul Kerr
Henry Thomas Room	The story of a black Briton, David Monteith, retracing the life of his great great great grandfather, one of the last British slaves shipped from Africa to the Caribbean and one of only a handful of British slaves who left an account of his life as a slave. Paul Kerr will introduce it and answer questions. It will be of interest to both black studies and media studies. David Monteith may come along.	Screening of and discussion of the last documentary produced by Paul Kerr for Channel Four, first transmitted on 11th March 2007.
19-11-07	Vernellia R. Randall: Book launch:	Dying while black (2006)
TG30	40 minutes overview of the book, 20 minutes for questions. The book-signing will follow the talk	http://dyingwhileblack.org
(6.00- 8.00 p.m.)		
30-01-08	Duncan Bowle (LondonMet)	Strategic Planning in London
TM2-37	Professor Robin Thompson. Visiting professor of planning at Bartlett School of Planning, University College, London and planning advisor to Mayor of London. Title of his presentation is	'Planning London- the Future of a 'Global City.'
09-04-08	Arun Kundnani	The end of tolerance in Britain
HTR		
	Jane Soothill	Women and religion in Ghana
29-02-08	Balogh Mihály, Former Director of National Educational Library and Museum (NELM), Budapest.	Balogh Mihály: The work of the NELM
LH3-34.		Balogh Mihály: An introduction to Hungarian literature

3.00 – 5.00 p.m.		
12 March 2008 HRSJ Seminar 6	Professor Eileen O'Keefe (London Metropolitan University) and Professor Paul Hunt (UN Special Rapporteur on Health, University of Essex), Chaired by Professor John Gabriel (London Metropolitan University)	Human Rights and Health: Analysing Health Impact Assessment
30-04-08 Rm. TG-30	Richard Skues CANCELLED	Freud and the history of Anna O. Reopening a closed case
1-5-08 THR 4-9pm	Society, Information & Justice launch http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/isj Firoze Manji: Pambazuka News David Bowie Tony Bunyan, Director Statewatch ("Monitoring the state and civil liberties in Europe (www.statewatch.org/) ISJ Editorial Board members: Shiraz Durrani	Free flow of alternative news, ideas & information The Pambazuka experience "Promoting debate amongst people active in radical politics" "Watching the state, informing the people" Why ISJ?
7 May 2008 HRSJ Seminar 7	Dr. Martha Chinouya (London Met) Dr. Kevin Fenton (National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD and TB Prevention - Atlanta, Georgia, USA)	HIV/AIDS, Religion and the Trans-national African Family

No conclusion, the struggle continues

They say roll back

Recent trends in Britain, in terms of the declining social, political and economic rights of working people, are reflected in a parallel decline in public library services, staffing and resources. Increasing inequality in the society is reflected in libraries too. Massive roll back of the public sector as part of the political agenda of the present Government has created uncertainties in the public sector with increasing unemployment and service and staff cutbacks. Rights achieved over generations by working people are being lost while trade unions are also losing some of the powers they have held historically. This marginalisation of working people is reflected in libraries where services are cut and staffing reduced. The trend in the corporate-induced recession is to de-professionalise staffing and increase the use of volunteers and zero-hour contracts for staff expected to achieve even more with reduced staffing levels. Laws no longer protect those marginalised by the onslaught from the corporate world. There are even less prospects for innovation and progressive library activities as power shifts even more to conservative forces. Modrow (2013) sums up the situation today:

Now we are witnessing developments which show clearly the danger the current economic and social system poses to the future of humanity.

This new dimension is ideologically reflected in the victory of neoliberalism. It is portrayed as a downright religious idolisation of the market as the sole regulating structure for everything in everyday life.

The idolisation of the market means privatisation of everything which is fundamental to everyone's needs - food, clothing, housing, health and education.

The market knows only one purpose - the competitive striving for profit maximisation. The effects are evident globally and regionally, in the poorest countries as well as in the western capitalist nations.

This compares with the cut and thrust of the active struggles in Kenya and in London recorded in this book.

The equality legislative framework that enabled some of the library activities recorded here is gradually being weakened. While it was the Labour Government after 1997 which brought in some progressive equality legislation, particularly on race, it was the same Labour Government that "managed to get race 'off the agenda' " as Ouseley (2012) puts it. The process has been taken further downhill by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition Government that came to power in 2010. Equality aspirations and legislation has been sacrificed in the interest of big business. The task of ensuring equality has been handed over to "smart people in Whitehall" who have not managed to ensure equality for generations. Mulholland (2012) explains:

David Cameron has axed standard assessments used to gauge how policies affect different social groups as part of a drive to get rid of the "bureaucratic rubbish" that gets in the way of British business.

The prime minister outlined plans to axe equality impact assessments at the CBI [Confederation of British Industry]⁶⁹

⁶⁹ The CBI website explains its work: "Our lobbying and campaigning helps keep business interests at the heart of policy in Westminster, the devolved administrations, across the UK regions and internationally.

Our senior team ensure your voice is heard around the world by regularly engaging with policymakers, legislators and regulators - supported by an advisory team of 90 economic and policy specialists." Available at: <http://www.cbi.org.uk/about-the-cbi/what-we-do/> [Accessed: 19-12-12].

conference, saying new government measures needed to be “tough, radical and fast” to help British business compete in the global race.

Speaking in central London, Cameron said it could be left instead to “smart people in Whitehall” to consider equality issues while making policies.

Doreen Lawrence, the mother of the teenager Stephen Lawrence, murdered on racial grounds, shows the reality of equality in Britain today. Muir (2012) quotes her as saying that “the government risks returning the country to the intolerance and ignorance of the last century by turning its back on measures introduced to ensure equality”. “Race”, she adds, “is definitely not on the government’s agenda”. Her views on the fate of the recommendations of the Stephen Lawrence/ Macpherson inquiry reveal that the gains made in earlier years are being eroded: “if you look at the Macpherson recommendations, how many recommendations have been implemented? And of those that have, they have wiped them away already. There is no interest in Macpherson inquiry”.

The initiatives such as the Three Continents Liberation Collection in Hackney Libraries were small advances in the large arena of life. Yet it is doubtful if even such small advance can be made in the current political situation. If library services incorporating principles of equality and justice cannot be developed under today’s conditions, it is doubtful if a relevant service that responds to the needs of working people can be developed at all. The current situation is a desperate attempt by the corporate world to roll back the gains made by generations of working class struggles, even as capitalism is being discredited as being unable to meet people’s needs. It is a typical scenario of the corporate world taking advantage of social, political and natural events to claw back gains made by working class and roll back state power in the interest of finance capital and corporations, as explored by Klein (2008).

In Kenya, libraries have always faced funding shortages, but they too face the same questions as in Britain about their social role and how they can fulfil it. An important opportunity to establish a new vision of information and library service relevant to the needs of

the majority of the people was lost at the time of independence in 1963. The colonial system morphed into a very similar neo-colonial system which has survived to date, without the professionals and policy makers attempting to bring about meaningful change. A similar opportunity for a fresh start with a new vision exists, in theory at least, in Britain today as a way of surviving the new challenges. But as the very foundation of the public library institution itself is under attack, the conservative profession remains unwilling or unable to step out of its complaisant existence and remains wilfully paralysed.

But there is hope: new forces of resistance against finance capital and corporations are accelerating the demand for change. The search for alternative ways of behaviour and thought are fast creating new solidarity among people within countries and globally. Progressive information and libraries are part of this march for equality and justice and are joining hands with progressive people in other fields. The resistance is symbolised by the Occupy movement where progressive library activists meet activists from other fields and professions.

Such progressive movements help to establish new perspectives on being active librarians in an overall conservative social setting. Many useful lessons are being learnt from their pioneering ideas and practices. Perhaps the most important lesson for public libraries is to see themselves as part of the society as a whole and become active in the struggles waged by people for survival and development. Information can play a very powerful role in connecting different strands of social struggles. People's struggles for social justice and economic liberation are waged at various levels: political, economic, social, cultural and educational. Communication is at the heart of these struggles, linking different struggles and providing support mechanisms. And libraries, using traditional methods and new technologies, can be at the centre of this communication process. In addition, they can provide historical and hidden information from other struggles, past and present, national and international, to those creating new social relationships and new societies based on principles of equality and justice. This can provide a new social and political role for libraries. For this to happen, libraries will need to establish active relationships and communications links with people's struggles. The World Social Forum provides a useful connecting point for information activities, as indicated by Böök, (2006):

Support from librarians, as a professional group, should be just as necessary to the WSF as is, say, the contributions of journalists and translators...

Librarians could provide the global justice movement with a documentation service corresponding to the interpretation service offered by BABELS, which did the, indispensable, interpretation from English to French and French to English during our workshop in Bamako. ... In addition to discussing the role of the libraries in the WSF process, the workshop also confronted the general question: what would be an adequate public library service in today's African countries?

But before there can be any lasting improvement for libraries, there is a need to address some outstanding issues. One of these is raised by Hutton (2012) whose assessment is that Britain needs to "reject conservatism for a generation". This includes libraries. Except that there is a need to reject conservatism – in libraries as well as in the rest of the society – not only for a generation but for ever if it is to avoid the cycles of progress followed by corporate-led stagnation.

Another outstanding issue is to understand the unequal power relations in libraries and see the real power in conservative hands. Conservative librarianship did not just appear out of thin air: it is a manifestation of the hold over power by a privileged minority which has used its power to mainstream conservatism under its TINA (There Is No Alternative) agenda. This has created a situation in conservative librarianship similar to the one Chakraborty (2012c) finds in economics:

Mainstream economics now preaches a dogma that is particularly agreeable to the elite and has chased most dissenters out of its faculties. Meanwhile the other social sciences lack the confidence or the resources to take on economics. Where's the revolutionary thinking?

Progressive librarianship today has the potential to provide the dissenters and the revolutionary thinking needed to dislodge conservatism from its dominant position. But the potential cannot

be realised by merely wishing for change. Conservative librarianship has the power because it supports – and is supported in return by – the prevailing capitalist system. It also holds power because the rest of the library community has allowed it to take control. The time has perhaps come to challenge their monopoly over power. An active struggle needs to be waged by those really committed and those willing to be active in the struggle. The struggle has to “go universal” if it is to bring about a revolutionary change. This needs clear political and professional thinking, a progressive vision, and a willingness to take sides on the side of people. It needs strategic alliances within and outside the profession. It calls for passion, activism commitment and readiness for sacrifices. As a first step, it needs to liberate minds of librarians with relevant information and knowledge about social, political and economic reality, about power relationships, about alternative approaches to achieving a society based on principles of equality, justice and human rights for all. Of necessity, this threatens the status quo. Let the struggle continue.

A glimmer of hope?

A glimmer of hope emerges for British public libraries at the end of the year 2011. As part of its policy review process, the opposition Labour Party issued a document entitled *Libraries: innovation, co-location and partnership* (Labour Party, 2012). While the government has effectively ended all discussions about the role and the future of libraries, and the professional body, CILIP, has been rendered ineffective by its “Royal” charter and its “neutral” position of not getting involved in “politics”, not to mention its total commitment to conservative librarianship, the Labour Party initiative is a welcome beginning of a process of serious discussion on the role and future of libraries. After looking at the “damage that is being inflicted on the [library] service” by the Government, the policy document (Labour Party, 2012) underlines the failures of government policy:

The Government has repeatedly underplayed the seriousness of the problem. At a time when many library services are under threat, there is no sense of urgency, no coherent strategic direction, no guidance for local authorities, and

no idea about what might be the minimum acceptable outcomes ... the Government has a clear duty to minimise the damage being done to the library service and to provide an overarching strategic vision.

The Policy Review then goes on to give its vision of what a public library should do: fulfil the “more traditional, core role of lending books and ensure that users can learn and access information in new and innovative ways”. “Much more could also be done”, it adds, “to link libraries to other government services like health, education and employment”. It lists a number of reasons why it believes libraries are valuable”. These include community and regeneration; social justice; education and literacy; digital exclusion; business and employment; and a trusted space and partner for co-location or anchoring of other services. It makes a welcome comment on the role of staff:

The contribution of librarians is often greatly under-valued. Their role remains vital and with the proliferation of information sources, the diversification of the work of libraries and the need to forge new relationships with communities and beyond, it has the potential to be broader and more valuable than ever. (Labour Party, 2012).

The Policy Review makes some useful suggestions as to what the Labour Party would do “if we were in government”. These include “a comprehensive review of the service libraries could offer their communities”, “developing a long-term strategy”, “a clearer and stronger system of oversight and standards”.

In the library policy vacuum that libraries find themselves in in Britain today, this is indeed a welcome development, if for no other reason that it may help to start a new debate among librarians, communities and political parties, particularly in the period before the next general elections. And yet, the Policy Review is disappointing as it seems to have not learnt the lessons from the past. Innumerable policy reviews on libraries have already taken place, numerous Parliamentary Committees have reported on libraries, all based on input from the profession and communities. The time now is not to go to yet more such “comprehensive reviews”, but to find the essence from all these

reviews and come out with a strong policy and strategic document. At the same time, getting views from those who are totally committed to conservative librarianship or who have had no experience other than that of conservative librarianship would automatically mean that the review would recommend “more of the same”, perhaps with different emphasis on some aspects of “the same”.

In this situation, more reviews could be useful only if views, vision and experiences of progressive librarianship are taken seriously as an alternative to the failed model of conservative librarianship. But as the Labour Policy Review does not even mention this aspect, it is doubtful if any further reviews would lead to any qualitatively different recommendations from previous reviews. Even when previous research had made some progressive recommendations, these have largely been ignored, and the Policy Review does not refer to these. For example, the Report, “Open to All?” mentioned earlier in this book made a number of recommendations which the then (Labour) Minister welcomed. Yet such research does not feature in the Policy Review. The library situation today is in urgent need for action, and further time wasted in reviews would see the patient on death bed before new medicine is found. Some of the solutions that have been mentioned in this book include using policy documents from international bodies such as UNESCO and IFLA. Again, these do not seem to have been consulted by the Policy Review.

Another disappointment with the Policy Review is that it fails to challenge the very basis of conservative librarianship nor does it explore the potential of progressive librarianship. It thereby accepts the tenets of conservative librarianship as being the only ones available, falling into the TINA (There Is No Alternative) trap set by conservatism. It thus sees co-location and partnerships as solutions to the problems facing libraries today. It thus sees the role of libraries through the prism of what the practice is today and does not challenge the conditions that have created the problems in the first place. Its solutions are then quantitative ones of having more of same current “successes”, without addressing the fundamental issues of vision, role and functions of a public library service and coming up with a qualitatively different vision. It thus falls into the trap of improving and developing the things done today rather than seeing the need for a revolutionary change in the vision, aims and policies of libraries and information as a whole.

Further, the Policy Review could itself have set an example of how information and libraries can be at the centre of social, political and economic life by including libraries and information as important part of *all* Labour Policy Reviews to indicate that libraries and information are relevant to all areas of social policy. Then, once in Government, the Labour Party could have used this all embracing approach to bringing all Government Departments – such as education, health, culture, finance – within the overall remit of a relevant public library service.

We say fight back

As social contradictions sharpen in the second decade of this century, battle lines are being drawn: forces of conservatism led by corporate finance and their appointed politicians face people's resistance in many parts of the world. This charged environment affects libraries as well. Moves to close libraries and reduce staff and services are met by a fight-back by an as yet weak library resistance. But their weakness can be turned into strength if they join hands with other sectors also resisting similar cuts. Progressive librarians can work closely with the progressive sections of other professions, trade unions and other progressive national and international forces. Librarians are not alone in this struggle. Other professions are also getting active against corporate-inspired conservatism and for a progressive world based on principles of justice. Some recent examples show potential allies with whom progressive librarians need to work as part of their *library* struggle. The first is the Engineering, Social Justice, and Peace (ESJP) network which has launched its new journal, *International Journal of Engineering, Social Justice, and Peace*. The journal is intended to "to serve as inspiration and support for those who promote engineering for social justice and peace". The Journal's approach is "grounded more in critical social analysis (including, for example, feminist, anti-racist, decolonializing ethics)". The Journal's website explains the scope:

The International Journal of Engineering, Social Justice, and Peace is dedicated to the theory and practice of engineering that extends social justice and peace in the world. Our approach works toward engineering practices that enhance gender, racial, class, and cultural equity and

are democratic, non-oppressive, and non-violent. The journal serves practicing engineers, engineering educators, and a general audience that seeks to better understand the progressive potential of engineering. (*The International Journal of Engineering, Social Justice*).

In this, there is surely a common ground with progressive librarianship.

Another example of an organisation which is a natural ally of progressive librarians is "Historians Against the War". Their Statement dated 2009 included references to issues that are relevant for progressive librarians as well:

We deplore the secrecy, deception, and distortion of history, the repeated violation of international law, and the attack on civil liberties domestically that have accompanied US policies of war and militarism - policies that became especially belligerent in the aftermath of September 11.

We fear that the current, rapidly escalating crisis of global capitalism, which is creating suffering worldwide, will lead to escalating wars abroad and intensifying repression at home. We support solutions to this crisis that seek to enrich the lives and increase the power of people globally, and protect their fundamental human rights. We are unalterably opposed to any attempts to solve the crisis at their expense.

... we are mindful as well that the current conjunction of international and domestic crises offers an opportunity to alter longstanding destructive patterns. As historians, we believe that we can and must make a contribution to the broad, international movements for peace, democracy, and environmental and social justice. In pursuing our objectives, we look toward building and joining alliances with a wide variety of intellectual and activist groups that share our concerns. [Historians Against the War, 2009].

If "progressive librarians for justice" were to ally themselves with such organisations in the spirit of a progressive people's movement for justice, then they would not only set a clear dividing line with

conservative librarians, but increase the prospects of realising the progressive approach in all aspects of life, including libraries.

However, one should not underestimate the power and the reach of conservative librarianship. Their approach is dangerous as it remains a silent power that has permeated the lives and minds of policy and decision makers as well as the “mainstream” profession, including library teaching and learning programmes. It does not have to appear on public fora to justify itself, its approach and its beliefs. It has created a world in which they are the unseen power behind the scene and so can remain complacent in their dominant position. This makes the task of progressive librarianship even more difficult as it needs to fight an invisible, omni-present enemy. Exposing the very existence and the regressive but hidden stand of conservative librarianship remains an important task for progressive librarianship. It is only when it has been exposed and dragged onto open stage that a real battle with its ideas, stand and practices can begin. Reason and logic stand with progressive librarianship, but that is not where conservatism resides, instead it creates false and shallow battles to progress its silent march to domination.

So the task is by no means an easy one. It would be a mistake to see conservative librarianship as a powerless and weak enemy without formidable allies. It has survived and has developed its weapons over many generations; it has the backing of the entire corporate world which would not allow progressive forces to win. The loss of any one such arena – such as librarianship – could herald the death of the entire monster and so it will defend itself in each and every field.

Working with forces of capitalism, conservative librarianship thrives by pretending to be neutral as capitalism uses states and governments to enhance its global search for profit. At the same time, finance capital attacks the very state which has the capacity to defend all progressive initiatives and actions. Jack (2012) identifies the dangers facing all of us today, and progressive librarianship needs to pay careful attention to this gradual but the very real undermining of its very foundation:

As it is with football, so it is with the state. Not as “ours” as it used to be, hard to touch or see. “Less and less are we a nation and more and more just a captive market to be

exploited," Alan Bennett writes in the introduction to his new play, *People*, complaining that "the diminution in magnanimity" in the state's provision has rebranded the citizen as a customer "supposedly to dignify our requirements but in effect to make us available for easier exploitation". A few weeks earlier, the writer James Meek had published in the *London Review of Books* a similar diagnosis of the private ownership, often foreign, of public utilities. The commodity that made water, roads and airports valuable to investors was us, the people who had no choice but to use them. "We are a human revenue stream; we are being made tenants in our own land, defined by the string of private fees we pay to exist here."

The tendency is to discount a desire for local ownership as impossible nostalgia; to portray it as a childish simple misunderstanding of the world. We live in a globalised age, the clock can't be put back, what does it matter if a French company owns the electricity supply so long as it works? But Britain is an unusually open economy and something has gone missing: some sense of control, some texture that we can feel and think of as our own.

In this scenario, public libraries are seen by financial and corporate interest as no more than "revenue streams". For resistance to be successful, careful study needs to be undertaken of the nature, the strengths and the weaknesses of the conservative forces in the society while identifying and working with potential allies in the battles to come.

One area that conservatism, backed by capitalism, attacks in order to win its battles against working people is people's hope for a better world. Without this spark that can light the prairie fire, capitalism hopes to extinguish any prospect for a revival of people's struggles for a just world. But the rollback-fight back battles are part of the reality of life today.

The present reality and its implications, including for libraries, are best summed up by Prof. Samir Amin (Amin, 2012). He sees the current situation as "acceleration of centralisation of capital" which

is reshaping globalisation and deepening crisis for working people. Monopoly capitalism now controls *everything*. Amin identifies 5 areas of monopoly control world-wide exercised by capitalism-imperialism: technology, natural resources, intensified monetary and financial system, the media and armament. In this controlled situation the concept of “development” – what he called “lumpen development” – has become a question of survival for the majority of people. But this crisis of capitalism also creates a possibility of meaningful challenge to capitalism-imperialism. The system has become obsolete and Amin sees an objective ground for radical left to build an alternative anti-comprador block. It is time, he says, to move to the offensive and develop an independent initiative, similar to the Bandung Conference⁷⁰ in 1955 and emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement⁷¹ in the 1961. The strength of any new initiative has to come from the vast proletariat, not from governments.

While all the five areas of monopoly control mentioned by Amin (2012) affect libraries, a number have a more direct impact. These include technology and the media. The implications of the monopoly control over these fundamental issues on libraries need constant and on-going study by libraries. Also necessary is a regular check on the work of the World Trade Organisations particularly aspects relating to the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)⁷².

Developments in the technological fields affect all aspects of life today and offer new challenges as well as opportunities for libraries to reinvent themselves to be relevant to the ever-changing needs of people. Charles (2012) indicates the rapid developments which affect not only business and journalism but libraries as well:

Huge rips in the fabric of business models are caused by the arrival of something that does the same job much cheaper, or a better job at the same price; and the internet sure does

⁷⁰ See Wikipedia: Asian-African Conference. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asian%E2%80%93African_Conference [Accessed: 07-12-12].

⁷¹ See Wikipedia: Non-Aligned Movement. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-Aligned_Movement [Accessed: 07-12-12].

⁷² See Wikipedia: Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agreement_on_Trade-Related_Aspects_of_Intellectual_Property_Rights [Accessed: 07-12-12].

that when it comes to delivering news. When more than half the population has a smartphone, and about 90% has a computer, you don't have to hang around for a printed paper any more. Print has its charms, but so did Nokia's old phones. Much good it did them. Disruption waits for no man, woman or business model.

The technological developments have opened up even newer opportunities as Arthur (2012) indicates - self-driving cars and "drone journalism - using unpiloted mini-aircraft to relay pictures online". Institutions such as the Drone Journalism Lab are now providing "links, thoughts and research into using drones, UAVs [Unmanned Aerial Vehicle] or remotely piloted vehicles for journalism at the Drone Journalism Lab at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's College of Journalism and Mass Communications".⁷³

A profession that has not yet come to terms even with a very old technology - radio and broadcasting - needs to take a huge leap to be able to relate to the possible development of a "drone information technology".

So there is no conclusion to the struggle for a relevant, progressive librarianship. A wide range of issues and concerns need to be explored for the on-going struggle for progressive librarianship. Some of these were discussed earlier. A few can be highlighted here. The first is the level of misinformation deliberately given out to influence people's thinking, not only in the all-important economic field, but also in the political sphere. Those who doubt that this misinformation exists in an age of "free" flow of information can do no better than read Ha-Joon (2010) who says:

... the "truths" peddled by free-market ideologues are based on lazy assumptions and blinkered visions, if not necessarily self-serving notions.

If the free flow of information and knowledge among and between peoples is a central concern for libraries and librarians, then the misrepresentation of the causes and remedies of today's economic and

⁷³ For further information on this, see: "Drone Journalism Lab" available at <http://www.dronejournalismlab.org/> [Accessed: 11-12-12].

political crises are areas that matter to progressive librarianship. They matter because they relate to the very purpose and function of what librarianship is all about. They matter also because the functioning and viability of public libraries are in danger, as Ha-Joon (2010) says:

This catastrophe has ultimately been created by the free-market ideology that has ruled the world since 1980s ... the huge budget deficits created by the crisis will force governments to reduce public investments and welfare entitlements significantly, negatively affecting economic growth, poverty and social stability – possibly for decades. Some of those who lost their jobs and houses during the crisis may never join the economic mainstream again. These are frightening prospects.

And these are frightening prospects too for libraries as social institutions and for librarians as employees. This is no time to turn our faces from social reality in the mistaken belief that librarians “don’t do politics” or that we are neutral observers in the on-going social struggles. The action we take – or fail to take – now will determine the future of libraries – and also of librarians as workers and professionals.

Another issue that matters to librarianship is the one dealing with power, both at the society-level and in the profession. The unequal control over power, both to “capture government” and to misinform is well explained by Haring and Douglas (2012):

... You will not hear of any of this in the conventional US economic discourse. This is because of the *power* of the vested interests who want to distract you from realizing the extent to which they have captured government and economic opportunity for themselves. They tax the middle class, destroy their jobs security, steal from their pensions and divert their monies into capital gains, tax breaks, perks and freebies for themselves. What is being done to the American middle class is an exercise of *power* by a ruling elite just as morally corrupt and tyrannical as the European monarchies of old. [emphases in the original].

This mis-use of power is not confined to the USA only. It is evident in Europe today and has been used over generations in countries of the South. It is only in recent years that its manifestation has spread to include USA and Europe. Some librarians do not see – or do not want to see – this trend of eroding people's power which is then monopolised by the financial and corporate elite. But they will still be among the millions of victims who are daily losing their jobs, their houses and their public services. Their “neutrality” will not save them or their jobs or their libraries from those hungry for power and wealth. And this “neutrality” façade does not absolve librarians from their social responsibility to their profession or to their societies. Librarians, just as much as economists “are supposed to be about revealing truth” as Haring and Douglas (2012) say:

Economics is supposed to be about revealing truth such that society learns to become better than it was before. In this, it is supposed to be like physics or medicine. It is not supposed to be another tool for the powerful to enrich themselves at the expense of the others. And it is most certainly not supposed to be a weapon for achieving US hegemony at the cost of everything else.

The damage that social inequality and unequal power structures and relations cause to society ultimately affects everybody. An important role for librarians is to make transparent these opaque power relations. “Informed voters can then demand redress” as Haring and Douglas (2012) say. Conservative librarianship is not capable of taking on this social task. It remains for the progressive librarians to chart out new paths to this new future. In this, they can be guided by the vision of the Progressive Writers' Association described by Faiz (2008):

The idea was to have a movement allied not to any particular political party but to an ideal – the ideal of taking the masses towards social emancipation and progress. The formula was based on a realistic appreciation of the social situation and visualization of a free and just society. The goal was to guide the people towards freedom and to use their genius to establish an order based on social justice, an order in which

an individual's status would be determined not by heredity or wealth but by their own merit.

Today, progressive librarianship needs, first of all, to undo the damage done by conservative librarianship which has taken away self-belief among librarians that the profession is capable of responding positively to challenges facing the profession today. A new hope has to be instilled that creative and relevant change is possible in the library world. Secondly, it needs to present an alternative world outlook, "a new blueprint of values and attitudes" (Faiz, 2008) and locate librarianship within an overall social, political and economic progressive vision with an activist agenda. It is in this way that the profession can play a meaningful role in the struggles of the people to create societies based on principles of equality and justice for all. It is in this way that a relevant library service to meet today's challenges can be developed.

The library profession as a whole needs to consider seriously the concern raised by some at the World Social Forum (WSF). The theme of a workshop at the World Social Forum in Tunis in March 2013 is "Decolonising the WSF: A critical discussion of the production of knowledges within and about the social forum". While the issues to be raised at the workshop concern knowledge about WSF, its approach and the critical examination of issues apply to information in society in general and hence has a direct relevance for libraries. The workshop publicity states:

While the WSF has enabled an unprecedented diversity of movements to come together and learn from one another, and to a significant extent succeeded in giving voice to marginalised groups, it also suffers from its own hierarchies and exclusions which reflect the colonial, capitalist and patriarchal power relations that structure the world as a whole (WSF, 2013).

It is not only WSF that suffers from "its own hierarchies and exclusions which reflect the colonial, capitalist and patriarchal power relations that structure the world as a whole". The entire information world suffers from unequal power structures as examined in this book. But it is not too late for librarians to be part of this self-investigation

process started at WSF and indeed to go one step further and take up the theme at every conference of librarians around the world. The resolution to the problems facing librarianship is in the hands of librarians themselves.

Fight for the rights of the people

That public libraries need a new approach, a new direction and a new vision should now be obvious to all. But these are unlikely to come from within the narrow confines of conservative librarianship. These can come, instead, from the lessons of people's liberation struggles. The guidance from Walter Rodney, the "prominent Guyanese historian, political activist and preeminent scholar, who was assassinated in Guyana in 1980"⁷⁴ is what can perhaps save librarianship. The guidance needs to be studied by all librarians and should be the first lesson to students of librarianship:

You have to see
with the eyes of the people.

You have to hear
with the ears of the people.

You have to speak
with the voice of the people.

You have to fight
for the rights of the people.

At the same time, they need to heed calls from Kenyan activists: *Never be silent - simama imara*.⁷⁵

Such is the wider social remit of a relevant, people-orientated progressive public library service based on principles of equality and justice. This is politics, this is poetry, this is economics, this is librarianship. This is life.

⁷⁴ Walter Rodney: Wikipedia. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Rodney [Accessed: 26-12-12].

⁷⁵ *Simama imara*. Kiswahili for: *Stand firm*.

Afterword: Study & Reflection

A. Developing an alternative approach: some themes

While progressive librarianship needs to analyse current situations, there is also a need to explore alternative approaches to developing relevant services for all. But alternatives cannot be developed in a social and policy vacuum. An initial step is to examine the obstacles which prevent the development of relevant services. Some such obstacles as well as other relevant themes are mentioned below.

Needs and capabilities

Information is generally recognised as a gateway to knowledge which would enable citizens to sustain livelihood and have access to products made possible by developments in technology. The question then is: what information is needed by people in order to access such knowledge. There is thus an emphasis on the information needs of people. But it is not the professional deliverers of service who, on their own, can assess the needs of various communities. It is the people themselves who can assess their needs. For this to be a meaningful process, they need to have appropriate tools and a full menu of choice together with adequate information about what each choice implies. However, different people have different

capabilities in relation to this menu of choice. The mere provision of information does not, in itself, imply that people have access to knowledge. People's capacity to make use of information, to turn it into knowledge, requires skills and resources many of which some people do not have. These include literacy, numeracy, education and learning, time and equipment to make use of the information. Other requirements are experience since childhood, power and resources to use the information such as on health. Those who do not have these skills need to be served with compensatory services by libraries. Those with less education, less power and less wealth need to be compensated so as to create a level playing field with those with more education, more power and more wealth which would enhance equality.

Garnham (1997) is correct when he says that it is not "access in a crude sense that is crucial but the distribution of the social resources which make access usable". This relates to Amartya Sen's "capabilities" approach as Garnham (1997) explains:

People differ in their natural endowments, for instance some may suffer from physical disability. Those so disadvantaged may require a significantly higher level of resources or incomes to produce the same level of capability.

The approach of the conservative library service is to provide information without getting involved in the issue of whether people have the capability to make use of the information. They therefore do not fulfil a key function of their profession.

Relevant information for development

The relevance of information services is a recurring theme among progressive librarians. The examples in this book indicate an approach which sees relevance of information being judged on whether it meets the needs of people in terms of content, language and form, among other aspects. It emphasises the need to investigate people's information needs so as to decide on the most appropriate form and content of information services. The Kenyan experience shows the importance attached there on the issue of "relevance", for example

an Editorial of the *University of Nairobi Library Magazine* was entitled “A Relevant Library Service” as early as 1980.⁷⁶

Relevance of information services also needs to be seen in terms of whether it enhances development. Progressive librarians see relevant information playing a central role in supporting national, individual and social development. In this context, the term “development” is seen as defined by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD):

Development is a qualitative concept that entails complex social, cultural and environmental changes.

It is the role of information and communication in development that concerns progressive librarianship. This is seen as the need for a people-orientated approach and as a matter of equality, human rights and justice, as the World Summit for Information Society (WSIS, 2003) puts it:

... we declare our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge.

The concept of justice and equality needs to be understood in this context. It is “communication for development” that is at the centre of the case studies in this book. The Communication for Development Roundtable Report (2004) sees this as being about “dialogue, participation and the sharing of knowledge and information”. But it also acknowledges that there is a need for “a redefinition of Communication for Development ... within the context of the 21st century, bearing in mind the new political and media landscape. It goes on to look at the central role that communications play in achieving the Millennium Development Goals:

Communication in development ... has moved from a focus on information dissemination to one on community participation. It is clear that the Millennium Development Goals cannot be achieved without good communication.

⁷⁶ Issue No. 3 (1980). Also reproduced in *Quarterly Bulletin, IAALD*. XXVI (1) 1981(12-20).

The Communication for Development Roundtable Report (2004) provides a clearer understanding of the relationship between communication and development:

If development can be seen as a fabric woven out of the activities of millions of people, communication represents the essential thread that binds them together

The challenge for the information profession – one which progressive librarianship has fully accepted – is to see the implications of the debates on development on the information field.

But development does not take place in a political vacuum. A blind use of development theories, without taking into consideration class reality, without taking into consideration political reality cannot lead to any real development. Thus any communications system that is to meet the developmental needs of people has to address the political aspect. Castells (1999) underlines the obstacles to the use of theories of information for development if the all-important political aspect is missing:

We have the technical knowhow, the technology to do it, and the economic and institutional strategies to implement it. The obstacles, of course, are political.

The political situation that the library profession has to consider is the state of class in their society and the intensity and direction of class struggles. It has to consider the control and distribution of economic and thus political power in their society. Thus if conservative librarians remain aloof from the political and power issues in society, they remain unable to understand social dynamics. They cannot then make use of appropriate tools to ensure that information reaches those deprived of economic and social power. They have voluntarily abandoned the very tools that can make their professional work meaningful to the majority of people in their society. In practical terms, they then serve the wants and interests of only those with such power, ignoring the needs of the majority. It then remains for progressive librarianship to use the under-utilised tools of social analysis to understand power relations and then develop theories and practices to meet the information needs of all.

The key questions that progressive librarians seek to answer are: communication between whom? For what? And how? Most debates on development take place between policy makers, politicians, academicians and sometimes with professionals. The people who are “being developed” are seldom involved in this communication. Nor are they usually involved in deciding on what are the priority issues for them. The very language of communication is often alien to them. Again, “development” is often seen as a process performed on those needing developing, not a process in which they are active participants. Progressive librarians are committed to changing the very debates and policies around information and development to ensure that the target population is an equal partner in the process of development.

Technical and social aspects of information

Information and public libraries need to consider the two aspects of information: the technical and the social. There needs to be the same emphasis on social aspects as on technical ones. Developments in the latter, especially in ICT, will not, by itself, bring about development to those who need it most. As Panos (N.D.) notes:

Information and communication are essential elements of many aspects of development ... Without the capacity to seek information, to debate issues, and to make their voices heard, poor and rural people risk becoming more and more marginalised from their nation's and the world's economies.

With the rapid developments in ICT, there has been some progress in ensuring that those marginalised in the past would benefit by a better distribution of benefits for all. However, as Communication for Development (2004) notes:

There was a general acknowledgement that the rapid expansion of ICTs has failed to bridge the gap between knowledge and information and that the poorest still have very limited participation in the development process.

It sees evidence for a “gradual shift ... away from technological and towards more socio-economic and cultural definitions of the

Information Society". It is these "socio-economic and cultural aspects" of information and development that is of particular interest to progressive librarianship.

Training information professionals

Given the well-entrenched control over training of librarians by the conservative librarianship system, adherents of progressive librarianship need to influence the next generation of entrants to the profession at the stage where their professional training takes place. It is at this stage that their outlooks and skills are formed. Thus one way of creating a new library system is to ensure that the training of librarians takes on board issues of relevance to progressive librarianship, some of which are raised here. It is not merely a question of "teaching" new professionals to absorb the latest thinking. There is a need for librarians to be active learners so as to better meet the needs of the communities they serve. Progressive librarianship seeks to instil skills and knowledge to create a new consciousness among people about their society - something that the conservative practice shies away from.

Incorporating reflective learning

A number of concerns mentioned in Durrani (2006/07 and 2007) are incorporated in the ideas and practices in the case studies mentioned in the book. One of these is the question of how one develops relevant information services. The projects provide some ideas on what services would meet people's needs but they also point to other important aspects: the need of on-going learning, formal and informal, on the part of those planning and delivering the services. The ability to manage change also involves on-going learning by all those involved in the service. This requires there to be "integration between theory and practice" and that the "strategy should make available opportunities for participants to reflect on their knowledge, experience and practice" (Quality Assurance Agency, 2002). Putting theories into practice from a critical and informed perspective is of increasing significance in a rapidly globalised world requiring new skills among citizens. The development of transferable intellectual and study skills within a

lifelong learning context is equally important. Experiential learning or “learning by doing” forms the basis of many of the projects included in this book in keeping with the Kolb Learning Cycle” (Fry, Ketteridge and Marshall, 2003). Thus the Quality Leaders Project, the Merton Library approach and the PALIAct project all share the approach of “learning by doing” with an emphasis on reflective learning, expanding horizons and increasing awareness. All of them include an understanding of theories as well as exposure to practical experience. It is important to find a balance between learning from theories and learning from practice as too much emphasis on any one of these aspects distorts the learning process and does not lead to desired results.

B. Intertextual reflections: Alice Corble

Alice Corble: Intertextual reflections on the politics of the human: a study guide

As a graduate student exploring the politics of librarianship for my sociology PhD research on British public libraries, I was thrilled to discover Durrani’s work after stumbling upon the Library Juice Press website. After entering into an engaging correspondence with the author, in which we shared mutual concerns about the lack of adequate progressive library research and publishing platforms in the UK, I agreed to become a critical reader of the *Progressive Librarianship* manuscript and offer editorial feedback. This process has deepened and developed my thinking on this topic, given me valuable insight into the complexities of postcolonial library politics, and underlined the importance of dialogical thinking in covering relatively uncharted research territory. I am pleased to be able to share some reflections here in order to provide some provocations for further research.

My engagement with this book was informed by an engagement with another book, one written in Montreal during the mid-seventies. Thanks to Library Juice Press, we now have access to a little text by Andre Cossette called *Humanism and Libraries: an essay on the philosophy of librarianship*, written in 1976, translated and re-issued by Rory Litwin in 2009. I read this shortly before coming to *Progressive Librarianship*, and soon realised they are unwittingly in conversation with one another, speaking across three continents and over three

decades. From the mid twentieth century to the early twenty first, these two authors address strikingly similar issues, in strikingly different geo-political contexts. In what is sometimes referred to as today's globalised, 'post-library' information society, we are witnessing drastic technological and economic changes similar in magnitude to the ones that took place in society during the mid-seventies. These changes are rapid and relentless and carry a threat of crisis and loss to the world of libraries. But one thing remains the same: the need for public and progressive libraries and their facilitators to fulfil their social roles. Understanding these roles requires an understanding of the philosophies that underpin them; in particular what is the 'humanist' goal of librarianship.

As Cossette succinctly argues, articulating a philosophy of librarianship entails articulating a philosophy of humanism. He does this by offering a historical overview of the intellectual foundations of the profession and challenging us to examine the internal and external logic and contradictions of its mode of operation. I read Durrani as taking this challenge to a whole new level. The counter-histories and archival accounts he provides demonstrate forms of LIS practice that swim against the tides of mainstream or conservative library practice in order to change the social worlds of oppressed people. This is much more than what is known in Britain and the US as "community" or "alternative" librarianship. It is a form of library and information practice that – given the right conditions – can create a revolution in the heads and hands of the people who access it.

The analytical and empirical foundations of progressive librarianship that Durrani attempts to establish with this book go beyond Cossette's call to re-articulate the philosophy of librarianship by pushing the discourse into a political economy of librarianship in a post-colonial, capital-subsumed cultural present. This perhaps retains some of the meaning of the French term *Bibliothéconomie*, whose English translation as Library Science loses the economic root of the term. Library and Information Science/Studies sits somewhat awkwardly between the arts and the sciences. Arguably it belongs in the humanities before it is applied to the social sciences, since the practice of librarianship is inescapably tied to the subjective experience of the human. No matter how hard we try to objectify our knowledge of the activities and operations of libraries, questions of

value (economic, ethical, cultural) stick to them like stubborn shadows. What Durrani does in *Progressive Librarianship* is to make explicit the values and beliefs that underpin *all* library practice, which he argues can never be fundamentally neutral, thus fulfilling one of Cossette's demands for developing library philosophy (Cossette 2009: 9).

Cossette ends his short text with a bold declaration about the potential of libraries to achieve humanistic social change:

As an institution of the distribution of information, libraries give each individual the means of critiquing power and, by the same service, prevent the coming of a totalitarian state, which is often the result of public ignorance. Libraries can be a powerful lever for social transformation. Human progress necessitates a democratization of information that libraries help bring about. How could one imagine the creation of an authentically just society without full and open access to information? Wouldn't a global project of human liberation that does not care about the humanistic aims of libraries risk losing the alienated masses it wants to save? In being a service of documentation and research, libraries can surely be considered as "the great potential of society."

(Cossette 2009: 61)

And so as Cossette takes his leave, Durrani enters the stage of this unfolding global liberation project. The archive of experience provided in *Progressive Librarianship* traces this role of libraries as "a powerful lever of social transformation" in various manifestations over the next thirty five years in both Kenya and Britain.

The detailed examples of the foundations of progressive librarianship provided by Durrani in this book offer valuable lessons for Western readers. Durrani's own lessons have been learnt in harsh and challenging contexts. Where oppression is most stark and inequality so gross, the space for resistance, progressive movements and solidarity can also be the greatest. In the 'West', we don't always have such a clear insight into the concept of progressive librarianship, because we don't generally have such a clear insight into the oppression surrounding us and the social struggle we need to engage in to combat it. However, as Durrani demonstrates this has

changed somewhat since the financial crash of 2008 and subsequent economic austerity measures across Europe and the US, as the cracks in the capitalist system are becoming more visible. We are seeing more and more mass protests and riots on an international scale. Sometimes libraries bridge these cracks, sometimes they fall through them. Librarians, archivists and researchers need to document the LIS practices involved in these changes and make them part of a more consolidated field of progressive librarianship.

Litwin ends his translation of Cossette's text by posing a set of questions for further reflection, which resounded in the back of my mind throughout my reading of *Progressive Librarianship*. But by the time I finished reading and reflecting on the present book, however, I arrived not at answers but at a series of further questions. As twenty-first-century thinkers and doers of librarianship, we should individually and collectively seek answers to these problems in our places of research, practice and employment.

- Cossette speaks of the humanist and liberatory guiding philosophy of librarianship in terms of "saving" the alienated masses. Durrani follows suit by advocating that progressive Librarianship works with publics to save them from discriminatory and oppressive forces in society. What ideological assumptions are embedded in this demand for "salvation"? Would society be less "humanist" in its foundation without progressive librarians and their counter-hegemonic practices?
- It is both interesting and philosophically-challenging to consider where social justice activism ends and progressive librarianship begins. If, as Durrani suggests, progressive librarianship can be taking place before it is considered or named as such, this begs the question of how many social struggles across history and geography could be considered as acts of progressive librarianship? What other examples throughout the world might be comparable to the Kenyan experience?
- Much has been written on the role of *place* in analysis of contemporary public libraries, but less so on the

people that make and re-make them as interactive sites. Durrani's book presents a novel way of using archival documentation of practices led by particular "movers and shakers" in the progressive library field. In what ways can incorporating elements of biography, narrative and archival documentation provide a new mode of articulation for exploring the possibilities of progressive librarianship? How far is telling stories about human struggles part of the task of the progressive librarian? And how does Durrani's use of poetry, theatre and visual art forms challenge the lenses through which librarianship is usually viewed?

- LIS research is usually confined to the scholarly domain of its own professional discipline. In what ways can interdisciplinary research open out further the knowledge in the field of Progressive Librarianship? For example, how might postcolonial theory from the disciplines of cultural studies and sociology critically inform the values that underpin progressive library practices?

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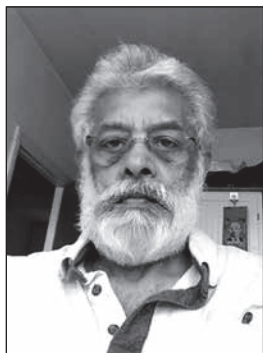
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About the author

Shiraz Durrani



Shiraz graduated from the University of East Africa and got his library qualifications from the University of Wales. In Kenya, he worked at the University of Nairobi Library. Shiraz was an active member of the then underground December Twelve Movement/Mwakenya in the late 1970s and 1980s. Following the publication of his articles on the history of Kenyan anti-imperialist, liberation struggle in national press, Shiraz

had to leave Kenya for Britain in 1984. Since then, he worked at Hackney and Merton public libraries, and following this, lectured at London Metropolitan University.

Shiraz's main interest is politics of information. His book, *Never Be Silent, Publishing and Imperialism in Kenya, 1884-1963* came out in 2006. His earlier short book, *Kimaathi, Mau Mau's first Prime Minister of Kenya* (1986, reprinted 2009) remains an important resource for political activists in Kenya today. A revised version was published in the *Communist Review* in 2013 under the title, *Mau Mau, the revolutionary force from Kenya*. He has published many articles and given conference papers, some of which were included in his 2008 book, *Information and Liberation: Writings on the Politics of Information and Librarianship*.

"In this book on progressive library movement, Shiraz Durrani challenges us to look at the concept and practice of library differently, while also providing invaluable information on the alternatives in both Kenya and Britain. He thus continues the critical tradition he has already established with his earlier works, particularly, Never Be Silent. It's all right to be silent inside a library but never about a library"

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

"This book is required reading for all those working in public libraries, whether qualified librarians or not. It sets out why public libraries are so important, how change is achievable and how all people can be supported to use information to improve their lives. Told through the remarkable career of an inspirational librarian, it gives hope to all those wishing to do more than issue a pile of mindless books"

Catherine Lusted

"The detailed examples of the foundations of progressive librarianship provided by Durrani in this book offer valuable lessons for Western readers"

Alice Corbel

PROGRESSIVE LIBRARIANSHIP

Public spending is under threat and public libraries are suffering. At a time when libraries can play a critical role in supporting people facing difficult economic and social situations, the dominant conservative model of librarianship has nothing meaningful to say about the role and relevance of libraries. It offers more of the same, but no qualitative change so necessary today. It continues to maintain the myth that there is no alternative to its own policies and practices. There is thus an urgent need for alternative ideas and practices to address people's needs.

The progressive librarianship movement is taking up this challenge. It has also been active in Kenya and Britain but its work is not widely known. The Kenyan movement differed from the others in that it grew within the underground political movement in the 1980s – the December Twelve Movement/Mwakenya.

Using original documents, this book records this hidden history. In the process, it examines key concepts such as the role of libraries and the relevance of service. Linking library work with the wider social and political concerns, the book explores issues such as politics of information, the role of activism and "neutrality" in library work. It offers an alternative approach to librarianship, to the training of librarians and to organisational change to make libraries more relevant to people's lives.

